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Oblivions would overwhelm all the glory of the world, had not God provided for mortals the remedies of books.

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THE SHEER FOLLY OF PREACHING

ALEXANDER MacCOLL

"For when the world with all its wisdom failed to know God in His wisdom, God resolved to save believers by the sheer folly of the Christian message."

1 CORINTHIANS 1:21 (*Moffatt's Translation*).

THE SHEER FOLLY OF PREACHING

BY

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MINISTER OF THE SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
IN PHILADELPHIA

Author of "A Working Theology"

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THE SHEER FOLLY OF PREACHING. II

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Gratefully Inscribed

to

GRANT CRAIG MacCOLL

MY SEVEREST CRITIC, AND MOST CONSTANT AND UNFAILING HELPER, WHOSE HAPPINESS AND USEFULNESS AS A MINISTER'S WIFE ARE THE MORE NOTEWORTHY IN THAT SHE DID NOT MARRY A MINISTER

I have not attempted to disguise these chapters. With one exception they are sermons, printed in large part as they have been preached in the churches I have been privileged to serve and in some of our universities and schools. They are sent forth, in manifest imperfection, as sincere expressions of one man's faith that the business of preaching is supremely worth while, that its themes are the most fascinating as well as the most important which can occupy the mind of man, and that any generation which should count as a minor interest the perpetuation of "a godly and learned ministry" would be sadly lacking alike in vision of the real values of life and in vigor to meet the needs of the world.

A. M.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

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THE SHEER FOLLY OF PREACHING

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Chapter I

Has Worship Any Real Place in Modern Life?

> The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for such doth the Father seek to be His worshippers.
>
> —John 4:23.

A Scotch minister of distinction,[1] who has been visiting the United States, gave utterance in an address to a sentence which ever since has been much in my thought. "A man," he said, "rises to the greatest height of which he is capable when he enters the door of a church." I found myself asking whether I believed this; for, if so, how very great and responsible it makes the work of the minister. I found myself asking whether the people to whom I preach believe it, or even think much about it. "A man rises to the greatest height of which he is capable when he enters"—

[1] The Rev. Norman MacLean, D. D., Minister of St. Cuthbert's Parish Church, Edinburgh.

it is assumed, of course, that he does so in sincerity and reverence—"the door of a church." Is it true? It would be easy, of course, to argue that it is not. For worship, surely, is not the substance, but only the sustenance, of the Christian life, and the life sustained must be greater than the food which sustains it. Is it not a far greater moment when the Christian goes forth to some bit of humble service, lending a hand, lifting a load, healing a wound, than when he sits in church? Is not the young man on the city street, lonely, discouraged, tempted to forget the dear ones and the sacred influences of home, and find fleeting pleasure in shameful self-abasement, greater when he says, "How can I do this wickedness and sin against God?" or "Get thee behind me, Satan," than when he sings lustily,

"In the hour of trial,
Jesus, pray for me."

Did not the soldier boy attain a far greater summit of manhood when, leaving behind all he counted dear, he laid down his life that to others the best things in life might be preserved than when he sat harangued by the chaplain? Was not Jesus far greater when He took a towel and washed His disciples' feet than when he went, as His custom was, to the synagogue on the Sabbath day? Of course. But is this the last word

on the subject? Do you remember the words in which the New Testament records the incident to which I have referred? "Jesus, knowing that He was come from God, and went to God."—Jesus, that is, recognising in His life a commission and a trust from God, recognising in it, too, a responsibility for which He would give account to His Father; Jesus, knowing that He was come from God and went to God—in this sublime consciousness of the living God, took a towel and began to wash his disciples' feet. The foreground of the picture is an act of self-forgetful service; the background shows Him in communion with His Father. Without either the picture would have been sadly incomplete.

Now I am not interested in a discussion as to the comparative greatness of this or that experience of life. But I am profoundly concerned that we should all of us think more often and more highly than we commonly do of the place of the worship of God in life, of its meaning and necessity to us, and of its testimony to the world. I wonder, then, if I may not put the words of my Scotch friend in this way; that the worship of God is the supreme privilege and the great necessity of life, deserving of our most earnest thought, our utmost loyalty, the best and the most we can bring to it. The most important question for every one of us is the question whether there is

a God, what kind of a God He is, whether He has anything to do with us, and we with Him, whether we can know that He is near, that He is Love, whether there are issues here that determine destiny beyond. In every other experience of life we are apt to live on a material level. We are neighbours and friends, competitors in business, sharers in one public movement or another, very busy with the details of life, its furniture and equipage, until, drifting somewhat heedlessly on, one day we are arrested by some sudden shock, perhaps a physician's warning that for us the sands of life may be running out, or the death of a friend, one moment full of life, busy with many interests and responsibilities, the next apparently silent, cold, gone. And we ask, "What does it all mean? Is there anything beyond? Are there any values that endure?" But in the hour of worship we see ourselves and our fellows as immortal spirits, sons of the eternal God, discovering life fully only in God, gaining balance, insight, victory only through Him. The same minister to whom I have referred spoke of a great countryman of his who, recalling a certain service he had attended and the blessing it had brought to him, said, "It was that night I got my head out of time into eternity." He did not mean that he had then become other-worldly, joining the company of those who depreciate this

wicked, weary world. Notice the phrase, he got his head out of time. His feet remained solidly on the earth, his life in contact with the big realities of human experience, but his head in eternity, an immortal spirit wrestling with the problems of time and rising above them, bringing to them the atmosphere of a higher and enduring life.

If this be true, if it may be true, surely the worship of God ought to have a great place in our thought, the thing for which we provide first in our programme of life, the thing we never for any trivial reason permit to fail. Is it not here that our modern age has gone wrong? In our boyhood homes there was no question what we would do on Sunday. To-day many other interests intervene, many rival plans are suggested—rest, recreation, health, travel, service—all profoundly good, but none of them first, none of them surely taking the place of worship, the recognition of God, the seeking of His presence and His power, that worship which, if permitted to be last, soon ceases to have any reality and power. I do not believe it is an extreme statement to say that to-day our whole human problem, social, industrial, national and international, has at its heart more than anything else the decline of the spirit of worship with all for which it stands in the life of men.

But here certain questions regarding worship suggest themselves. May not communion with the living God be maintained without attendance at the house of God? Of course it may. The question is not, however, as to whether it may, but as to whether it is. Is the man who spends his Sunday without entering a church retaining in his life the reality of reverent worship? Is he recognising Jesus Christ as his Master and Saviour? If so, the example of our Lord is suggestive. He recognised, as few others perhaps have done, the value of secret communion. He spent whole nights on the mountain top in prayer to God; but also He went, as His custom was, to the synagogue. I suspect He went to the mountain top to receive from His Father the strength He needed, the assurance of His presence, without which He could not go forward; but He went to the synagogue to give by His presence His testimony to those great spiritual realities which the world is so prone to forget, to take His part in declaring publicly man's need of God, man's constant dependence upon Him.

Two or three things you and I should get from public worship which we cannot get from private prayer. One is the inspiration of fellowship in faith. It helps very much when I bring my weak, blundering faith to this place, thinking it hardly

strong enough to have utterance, and hear a great company of men and women, tempted and tried as I am, yet saying sincerely, "I believe." During the threatened railroad strike in the summer of 1916 the president of one of our great railroads spent a hot week in Washington in busy and anxious conference. On the Saturday he left for his summer home in Maine, travelling on one of the hottest nights of the summer. How attractive the porch, or the surf, or the golf course must have seemed on that summer Sunday! But at 10.30 he walked with his family into the village church. Nothing was further from his thought; but to some of us who knew what he had been through he brought that day the inspiration of fellowship in faith. Another thing we should get from public worship is the broadening of our sphere of interest in prayer. Our prayers are apt to become selfish. We feel as though no one else had such needs, such trials, such hardships as we. And then we come to the house of God, and who can estimate the needs which are represented by the average congregation? You remember the story of the British youth who said he got no good from going to church during the war because the minister had prayed for the king and queen, the members of the royal family, the army and navy, but he had said nothing about the airmen. His brother was an airman. I wonder if this is not

the thought which Jesus had in His heart when He said, "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done." Was it not His graphic way of telling us that it is the prayer that has first linked itself with some other's need that reaches the heart of God, and puts in action the energies of Heaven?

All this is the ideal, but what of the realisation? Has not the public worship of God often proved disappointing, worse than that, depressing? It did you no good, you said. It irritated you—nothing to stimulate, nothing to reveal the living God, nothing to send you forth having heard the voice of Christ Himself saying of your troubled, difficult lot, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" and in My strength you will. So many churches seem to be like those four struggling churches in a small community, each of them, with their ministers, barely existing. Some one met a pillar of one of the churches and said, "How is your church getting along?" "Not very well," was the answer, "but, thank the Lord, the others are not doing any better."

It is a real problem, no doubt of it. But sometimes is not the worshipper himself the problem? What of his preparation for worship? Nothing great in life is realised without preparation. What of the spirit in which he has come? Was it to see God, to be more conscious of His will,

more sensitive to His leading? Was it to gain a larger vision of life, and greater vigour for it? Was it to contribute one prayerful spirit to an atmosphere in which Christ's renewing, reviving, rebuking presence would be felt, and His wondrous power experienced? At the close of our last Easter morning service, when some of us thought we could understand what Handel meant when he said of the Hallelujah Chorus, "I did think I saw the heavens opened, and the great God upon His throne"—a stranger, doubtless a most estimable person, turned to one of the members of our church, sitting in the same pew, and said, "Would you mind telling me where you got your hat?" In a recent summer I was privileged to conduct a service in a summer resort, attended by persons of many communions and of more than one nationality. As I sat waiting, a prosperous looking citizen was brought forward and presented to me. After speaking some courteous words of welcome he informed me that he did not usually go to church but had come that day—which was meant apparently as a kindly compliment to the preacher. Then he delivered himself as follows: "I've had a drink, I've played nine holes of golf, now I'm in church, I'm having a hell of a time." These, I know, are extreme instances. But are they so very extreme? Is it any wonder that the worship of God disappoints

if we are not thinking at all of God, or if at best He is upon the fringe of our thought?

The worshipper may be the problem, also, in the spirit he shows to strangers who come to worship. There are two excuses for the pew-renting system—apart from these it is of the devil. One is that a family may sit together, and the beauty of family worship be preserved; the other is that suggested in the motto displayed in a New York church, "Members of this church have pews in order that they may show hospitality to strangers." To make any of those demonstrations of discourtesy of which one sometimes hears, to invite visitors to leave the pew and go to another, is but one way to manifest that utter lack of preparation for worship so essential if its purpose is to be realised.

The minister may be the problem. So often he is. His voice, his dress, his manner, his gestures, above all his message may be so utterly unworthy of the greatness of the occasion and the sublime task that is his. Particularly he must forget himself if he is to reveal Christ. "No man," some one has said, "can be consciously clever, and reveal his Lord." Who is sufficient for these things? And so in the worshipper's preparation there should be very earnest prayer always for those who conduct the service of worship. Robert Browning used to pray that God might be very

real to his minister. That is the great thing: nothing else is on that level. And then we do well to realise that the limitations of the ministry in these days, of which we hear so much, are the fruit of conditions in the shaping of which many of us have ourselves had something to do. The fathers came to America that they might worship God according to their consciences, and their early thought in the establishment of schools and colleges was to provide for a godly and learned ministry, and among the passionate prayers of many a home was that at least one son might be given to the ministry. To-day in our changed estimate of values many nominally Christian parents resist any such suggestion on the part of their sons. Many more have never cherished the desire, or offered a prayer, that one such son should be given to them. And so not from our gifted and cultured homes, but from those same simple areas of life in which Jesus found his disciples, are coming most of the men who give themselves to-day to the ministry. Is it not a shame that those to whom God has given the most should so often offer to Him the least? If the new day of the world is to be realised, it will be well surely that those who are at the beginning of their family life, and those who have sons soon to make choice of a life work, should pray God that there may be raised up many men who will help maintain in

the world at its best the sublime realities of Christian worship.

William Ewart Gladstone, through sixty years, made it his rule to enter every morning the nearest church or chapel for prayer before he began his work, and he strictly kept Sunday for the culture of his religious nature, scrupulously excluding politics and statecraft. To this he ascribed his health and his poise. When asked once about his churchgoing, and how a man with his keen intellect could listen to certain poor preachers of his time, he answered, "When the sermon is dull, I go to church because I love England." That is a great motive for churchgoing to-day—because we love our country, and have upon our hearts the need of the whole world.

Chapter II

Does It Matter What a Man Believes?

> All things are possible to him that believeth.
>
> —Mark 9:23.

And yet there are people who tell us that it does not matter what a man believes. The creeds are out of date, archaic in thought, meaningless to the modern mind in expression; to-day no intelligent man really believes them. The reason for the slender grip of the church on the minds of thoughtful men is that so often it attempts to force down men's throats a lot of stuff that no intelligent man can accept. Who knows anything about it anyhow? The important thing is not what a man believes, but what he is, and what he does.

So men often talk. But is it true? Does it not matter what a man believes? For a moment let us look for an answer to this Book, without (if you so desire) believing anything especially about the Bible save, as all good judges agree, that it is a great literature, a very accurate reflection and portrayal of the human heart, of human motives, of streams of tendency individual and national, and their inevitable issue. Let us

examine it for evidence that it does not matter what a man believes, studying it as one would study Shakespeare or Milton or Dante.

Here in the first pages is the story of a woman named Eve, who lived with her husband Adam in a very beautiful garden. Her life, somewhat abbreviated by modern standards in matters of dress (not very much abbreviated one sometimes thinks), somewhat restricted in interests and activities, was yet in many respects quite a modern life, just like our own. There are things she has been told she may do; there are things she must not do. There is food she may safely eat, food that will surely disagree with her, and fruit tempting to the eyes that will surely kill her. In the realm of the spirit, whatever his physical manifestation, Eve has an acquaintance (I do not like to say a friend) who is called the Serpent—a very superior and insinuating person, who aims to educate Eve's unenlightened mind, to show her that many of the things she has been taught are mere junk, to give her modern ideas and makes her an up-to-date woman. (It is said that the Serpent occasionally appears in the modern university.) And so he says to her: "This idea that you may not eat of certain trees in the garden is a primitive conception, which intelligent people have quite outgrown. The tree of which you have been told you

must not eat is really a life-giving tree; it will open your eyes; it will immeasurably enlarge your powers; you will become as the gods. The reason for the old restriction is that the Master of the garden is a jealous Master; he does not wish you to share his powers." Eve, then, has a choice of two fundamental areas of belief: the one given her by conscience, that is to say by God, that men and women are under authority, that there is in life a supreme "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" which one disobeys at dreadful cost; the other, that a man may do as he wills, that there is no higher law than his own moods and whims and appetites, that the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life may be supreme. Eve chose to believe the second, and out of her choice came to her and to her children disaster and death; she was driven from the garden. To her and to her household it mattered very much what she believed.

Here is a man named Cain, the oldest son of Eve—blood will tell. Cain was the first of the Huns—the Hun spirit, let us be clear, is not the monopoly of any one nation—the first to believe that if a man gets in the way of your ambition, the thing to do is to get him out of the way. How? Don't be too particular; just do it quietly, no one will know; sink him without a trace. It was Cain's brother, Abel, whose superior standing

with the Almighty was a daily irritation to Cain. And so one day when they were alone in the field —Cain believed they were alone—he slew him. But the author of this Book believed, indeed he knew, that they were not alone; and very soon Cain was confronted by One whose look was a judgment, who asked him: "Where is Abel, thy brother?" Cain had a belief ready for the emergency; he was the first of that mighty host of men who believe that the big thing to do is to look out for yourself—had he been a modern Cain "safety first" would have been his slogan—that you and I are not responsible for our brother-men; and so to God he says in insolent and self-righteous amazement, "Am I my brother's keeper?" It mattered very much to Abel what Cain believed, for it cost him his life; and it mattered very much to Cain what he believed, for out of his belief came murder, and a curse that went with him to his grave. "My punishment," he cried, "is greater than I can bear."

A long jump down the centuries. Here is a man named Job, for years a prosperous and highly favoured person, upon whom a strange sequence of misfortune falls. His property, his home, and finally his children are the victims of disaster and death. Job has three friends who have a very definite and final philosophy of life; misfortune, they believe, is the direct result of sin: take a cen-

sus of a man's troubles and you have an accurate gauge of his sin. They were the spiritual ancestors of that great company of people who do not get their theories from the facts, but first out of their inner consciousness they evolve a theory, and then make the facts fit the theory. Armed with their theory, quite sure that a man so afflicted of God as Job must be a terrible sinner, they go to him and accuse him of practically every crime in the calendar until the old man, hungry for a sympathetic word, cries out at their interminable philosophising, "Miserable comforters are ye all!" Job, on the other hand, through all his suffering has one great belief made deep and clear as never before. He had always believed in God, but somewhat at second hand, as of one about whom he had been told; but in his suffering there comes to him, first a new need of God, and then a new experience of God, until he cries: "I have heard of Thee with the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee." It mattered very painfully to Job what his friends believed. It has mattered very much to many men through the centuries, passing through dark rooms of suffering and pain, that there has come echoing down to them his great testimony: "He knoweth what is in the darkness," "He knoweth the way that is mine," "When He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

Here is another of the world's great sufferers who is also another of its great teachers—Hosea. Hosea had a tragic home sorrow; his wife Gomer was false to him, and his heart was torn with anguish. Gomer went from his home, but he could not stop thinking about her, somehow he loved her still. Years elapsed, and one day as he passed along with his sorrow buried deep in an aching heart, with his duty calling for faithfulness at his present post, he happened to see a girl exposed for sale in the slave-market. Going near he saw that it was Gomer, his faithless wife, once the companion of his home, come to this. What should he do? His heart told him. For fifteen pieces of silver and a homer and a half of barley he bought her, took her to his home, and cared for her. It mattered a lot to Hosea what he believed. His experiences might have made him bitter—a far less trying experience has soured many a man. He might have come to doubt God and shun man. His sorrow might have driven him to one abyss or another of self-abandonment. "What's the use?" he might have asked. And it mattered very much to the world what Hosea believed. For what did he believe? In the hunger of his heart for his faithless wife, he came to see a reflection of the hunger of God for the false, faithless, pleasure-loving Nation. And so he went up and down with a gospel which

he had learned in his sorrow, to which he gave expression in words like these: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? O Israel, return unto the Lord, thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." And then as he thought of those years when he watched over his poor, broken, sin-sick, abandoned Gomer, he put upon the lips of God Himself the thought that was then in his heart: "I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely." Never until Jesus came had the world such a gospel as Hosea gave it when he went through a home-tragedy with a great and adequate belief in the living God.

A single instance from the New Testament. Saul of Tarsus was a cultivated and patriotic Jew, a university man, who believed profoundly in his ancestry, in the faith of his fathers, and in their hopes, and his, of a coming Messiah. His soul was stirred with indignation by the claims of the followers of one Jesus who had been crucified, that He was the Saviour sent from God. As a devoted patriot and churchman, he gave himself to the pious task of exterminating the so-called Christians. He breathed out threatenings and slaughter against them. See him at his bloody task. But one day on a journey from Jerusalem to Damascus something happened; somehow there came to Saul a change of belief and because of it a change of life. Henceforth, to him to live was

Christ, the Saviour who had died for him and risen again, who was ever with him. To the service of Christ, to the winning of men to Christ he gave time, energy, possessions, talents, and finally life itself. It mattered tremendously to the world what Paul believed; the highest thought and life of the succeeding centuries have been moulded in no small degree by the fact that with his name Paul changed his mind, ceased to believe one thing, believed another.

And now a modern instance. In the twentieth century a great people, very great, elated by their strength and achievements and inflated with pride, came to believe themselves supermen, chosen instruments of the Divine will for the government of the world and the propagation of their superior culture. They believed that the supreme law of the Universe was the survival of the fittest, and that they were the fittest; that the elimination of the weak and the unfit was not simply a biological law, but a necessity for the future of humanity. As a means of accomplishing this elimination they believed in war; their sovereign, their statesmen, many of their literary men and most of their educators with one voice glorified war and for forty years made ready for it, scoffing at efforts toward a permanent world peace and resisting overtures for the reduction of armaments. They believed that might was right; that the

State is a law unto itself; that there are no higher standards of right and wrong than the will and the weal of the State. They believed, therefore, that there are no binding international covenants when the immediate interests of the State seem to be involved. They believed that the way to make war victoriously is to be ready and ruthless while your enemy is getting ready, to be first in the field and hit hard. They believed and proclaimed that in war any shameful inhumanity is really most humane, because by it the enemy will be terrorised, brought quickly to his knees, and the sufferings of the war shortened. Because they believed all these and a hundred more infamous distortions of the truth and damnable defiances of Him who is the Truth, they, with other contributing causes, have brought the whole world to chaos and the verge of ruin; they have brought their own great nation to utter disaster; they have brought death, perhaps the least to be lamented of their works, to ten millions of men; they have brought famine, sorrow, suffering and ruin far worse than death to millions of homes. And all this we recall not in self-righteous condemnation of those who have so falsely believed and so foully erred, but that we may ourselves be warned of the peril of loose thinking and of vague self-centred beliefs.

It is to be recognised of course that in belief

there are neutral areas of large dimension; there are major and minor beliefs; beliefs that matter much and beliefs that matter less; beliefs that are primary and beliefs that are secondary; beliefs that are of the age and beliefs that are of the ages. In Christian faith there is room for a large amount of conscious ignorance, for many things of which a man is saying: "I do not know," "I am not sure," "We see through a glass darkly," "It doth not yet appear." The Christian Church frankly recognises these neutral areas of belief when, as in the case of the Presbyterian Church, it declares that "No acceptance of the doctrines of the Church is required of any communicant beyond a personal faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour of the world, and a sincere acceptance of Him as Lord and Master." If a man be rejoicing in a saving relation with Jesus Christ, many of his definitions may be crude and obscure, but they are relatively unimportant; if he feed his soul upon the Bible, recognising it as the supreme record of the revelation of God and of man in Jesus Christ, and the great channel of present revelation and inspiration, his conception of the method of inspiration is of minor significance; if he believe in a future life, if his supreme purpose be to live now a life which cannot be holden of the grave, he may surely do his own thinking as to the part which his present body is likely to play

in the hereafter. To elevate the secondary to the primary, to insist that on questions on which devout men differ concerning the method of revelation as distinct from its substance, all shall think alike, is not simply to lose sadly the sense of proportion; it is commonly to conserve dogmas and lose men. But let us be clear about this. No belief, sincerely cherished, is unimportant. If even once it rise in the court-room of the mind and assert itself, it has its place in the making of the man.

Again, it is to be recognised that the character of a man's belief is more important than its content; how a man believes than what he believes. One may assent without hesitation to the Westminster Confession of Faith with the Thirty-Nine Articles thrown in, and believe all this in a mean, petty, irreligious spirit. On the other hand, one may have a hesitating and very imperfect creed and hold it "in a deeply religious spirit with the Infinite throbbing within him." "The devils," says one of the Apostles, "also believe and tremble." Indeed the Devil of Scripture is a most orthodox person, whose creed would be acclaimed in every Presbytery and diocese in the land. He believes in the inspiration of Scripture and has his proof-text ready—"It is written . . ." He believes in the Divinity of Christ —"I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of

God." He believes in God's loving care of men —"He shall give His angels charge over Thee"— in a Providence that watches over individuals— "Hast Thou not made a hedge about him, about his house, and about all that he has on every side?" But these were not his dominating beliefs; they had no relation to his life. We have hints of what these dominating beliefs were. He believed, for instance, that there is in life no such thing as a disinterested motive, that every man has an axe to grind, that every man has his price —"Doth Job fear God for naught?" He believed in "safety first," that the thing to do always is to save your physical life at whatever cost —"Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life." Not the beliefs that are the mere furniture and decoration of the mind, which a man keeps to use when convenient, which he looks at occasionally and leaves; but the beliefs of which he is speaking to himself over and over again in the secret places of his soul, the beliefs he has sincerely accepted and earnestly cherishes, to which he has brought the allegiance not only of the mind, but of the heart and of the will— these are the beliefs that matter supremely, that make a man what he is.

Life to-day is too tremendous in its possibilities for good or evil to be lived either in the fog of neutral areas, or in the unreality of hypocritical

pretense; it demands of every man frank affirmations of faith. And there are great affirmations toward which every one of us is either a believer or an unbeliever. Do you believe that a man's life is simply so much high-grade cosmic fertilizer, a meaningless scramble of elemental forces, from the cradle to the grave? Or do you believe in God the Father Almighty, from Whom we come, to Whom we go? Do you believe in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord, unique in His Person, unique in His mission, the Light of the world, the Saviour of your soul? Do you believe in prayer and in the power that comes through prayer? Do you believe with Jesus that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesses," and that "whosoever wills to save his life shall lose it"? Do you believe that right is right, since God is God, and that right the day will win; believe it enough to give your life always and at any cost in the service of the right? Do you believe that our splendid boys who have given their lives for the preservation of the liberties of the world have passed out or passed on, gone into the silence of the night or into fairer spheres and more glorious service than here they would ever have known?

It does matter supremely what a man believes; and there has never been a day like this, when the world needs men and women who believe some

few big things about God and the soul and the universe with all their might and are building their beliefs into the whole sweep and structure of an earnest life. Will you not say to-day with that man of old: "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief," and pray God to help you in the great days to come as never before to translate belief into energy and sacrifice and the very love of Christ?

Chapter III

Improving Upon God

> Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.
>
> —John 6:68.

The man who asked this question had apparently been thinking of the alternatives to Christian faith. "What else is there?" he had asked. If we give up Jesus Christ, to whom shall we go? It is a question deserving earnest consideration at a time (though there have been many such times) when some men are definitely abandoning the Christian revelation, and when others who retain formal allegiance find it increasingly vague and uncertain. A year or two ago a questionnaire sent by a university professor to a thousand scientific men of his own choosing, indicated that only 41.6 per cent of those to whom it was sent believed in a personal deity. A distinguished leader in the religious life of our time declared recently that in one of our leading universities, in the department of philosophy, all but one of the members of a large faculty were teaching a purely mechanistic conception of the universe. And what of ourselves? In certain moods, in certain

experiences, human life as a serious effort of Loving Omnipotence looks, does it not, like an utter contradiction, a dreadful tragedy, or an awkward joke? "If I were God" has been the title of more than one passionate utterance of a troubled soul in recent times. We have dared to feel, some of us, that if the creative business had been up to us, we could have made a better job of this queer old world. We are candid critics of the universe. We could even improve upon God—the phrase is more startling than the fact. Self-will is familiar enough, but what is self-will but a very persistent effort to improve upon God—my will, not His? My thought is that for a few moments we should consider the alternatives to Christian faith in this one form, that we try to construct in outline at least a better universe than the universe of Christian faith, a universe which will more happily respond to our questionings and to the needs of the world.

> "Oh, Love, could thou and I with fate conspire,
> To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,
> Would we not shatter it to bits and then
> Remould it nearer to the heart's desire?"

That is exactly what I have in mind, to shatter to bits the "sorry scheme of things" we know so well, and "remould it nearer to the heart's desire."

Certain fundamental questions at once suggest

themselves—I can only select a few of them. In this ready-made universe, this masterpiece of creative thought, shall we have a God, a great creative mind akin to ourselves, but greater and better far? Or shall our universe simply happen, the mysterious product through long ages of indefinable but impersonal forces, "some random throw of Nature's heedless die," as one of the poets suggests, we ourselves "cunning casts in clay," as another of them hints? Shall mind come from Mind and heart from Heart, or both from nothing in particular? Here it may be interesting to recall the saying of Voltaire, not himself a believer, at the time of the French Revolution: "If there is no God we must invent one or we are lost"; or that other saying of the Hebrew seer, "Where there is no vision (and he meant vision of God) the people lose restraint"—just what multitudes of them are losing all over the world to-day. But never mind Voltaire; never mind the Hebrew seer. Which is the more comfortable universe to live in, the universe in which things happen, or the universe in which God works? Which makes the better response to the reasoning faculty of man? At this point shall we not have a unanimous vote for that universe whose first sublime fact is recorded in the opening words of the Old Testament, "In the beginning God"?

But this was long ago. You are not interested perhaps in how things began. The important thing is that here they are. What kind of a God, then, shall we have to-day? Shall He be a God who exists but whom you and I, mere specks of dust in the sun, can never know, the agnostic's God; or a God who takes very good care to make Himself known, who in the thoroughness of His work lets no detail escape Him? Shall He be a God who is interested in some few people, but indifferent or antagonistic to the others—an exclusive God, with a strong leaning toward Americans and a sprinkling of British, but little use for anybody else—too good taste for that—a modern version of the Hebrew God, my God, but not yours unless you are kin to me and mine? Or shall He be a universal God whose purpose of good embraces all men and all races everywhere? Shall He be a limited God, like the God of Mr. H. G. Wells, well meaning but working against tremendous odds, caught in His own machinery; or an Omnipotent God whose very real limitations are free exercises of His sovereignty, the self-imposed restraints of a Father's love? Shall He be a God who in a kindly and capable way started the creative process long æons ago, but who to-day is merely a spectator of the great drama, absent in a distant heaven? Or a God who breaks right into the heart of human life, and where the need

is greatest and the fight is hottest, makes man's need His own, a God whose supreme revelation of Himself, His will, His plan, is made in the language which all men in every time can understand, the language of a throbbing, loving, self-forgetful human life? Is there a man here who can conceive or desire a God more God-like than He of whom another saying of this great book tells us that "The word (the last word of truth about God and man and destiny) became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory."

Another question. Shall we have a universe which exists for the strong in which, in perpetual and relentless strife, the weak are driven to the wall, the universe of recent German philosophy; or a universe which, seeming often to neglect the weak, jealously conserves them, in which no enduring value is forever lost, in which the least, the last, the lost are the supreme concerns of creative power, the universe of Christian philosophy? Shall we have a universe in which nothing matters much, in which everything will somehow turn out all right anyhow—an immoral universe? Or a universe in which in every life great enduring issues are at stake for weal or woe, which is a challenge to the best a man can bring to it, an opportunity for the eternities, a universe of whose unfailing order and justice it may be written, "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also

reap." To state these questions is surely to answer them for any man who has a high conception of life.

But now some practical questions for the amateur creator. Are there not certain things in human experience which should be forever eliminated? There is uncertainty for instance. How we suffer through uncertainty, crying many a day, "Oh, that a man might know the end of the day's business ere it come." Browning, you remember, had this idea of a world from which all uncertainty was banished, a world in which there was no want, no growth, no beginning or end, no hope or fear, in which all was serene and everybody happy. But Rephan, the world of his fancy, proved a stagnant, unproductive world, and the man whose soul it failed to satisfy soon heard the word of release calling him back to this old world of ours.

> "So thou wouldst strive, not rest,
> Burn and not smoulder, win by worth,
> Not rest content with a wealth that's dearth?
> Thou art past Rephan, thy place be earth."

Possibly then we had better retain in our model universe at least a small dose of uncertainty, for, if it went, certain heroic qualities would go with it: the patience that quietly waits; the persistence that doggedly holds on; the faith that cannot see, but clings and believes. Was not Stevenson right

when he said, "The veiled future is part of the kindness of this scheme of things"?

But surely there are some things we will eliminate—suffering, for instance, and struggle and death. What suffering men endure—think of it in Europe in these recent years! And what a pitiless struggle against hopeless odds many a man's life seems to be! And at the end only the tragedy and dreadful separation of death! Surely of these we will wipe the slate in our model universe. But are you so sure? For with them again there must go certain other eliminations—sympathy, that means "suffering with," but if no suffering survives, there can be no sympathy; and struggle, where there is no struggle, there can be no victory, no great battles against tremendous odds nobly won; and death—who can say a good word for death? Briggs Adams, the young American aviator, did when he wrote to his mother shortly before he "went west," "Death is the greatest event in life, and it is seldom that anything is made of it. What a privilege to be able to meet it in a manner suitable to its greatness." And Charles Kingsley, when he thought death approaching, said, "I confess that all my life I have looked forward with eager and reverent curiosity to this day." Yes, with death eliminated would go at least one of the most beautiful and wonderful things in human experience—surprise. "Eye

hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." When so viewed, "O Death, where is thy sting?"

It was a favourite saying of Margaret Fuller, "I accept the universe." When Carlyle heard of it he said, "Gad, she'd better." Yes, we had better accept the universe even if, imitating the Senate in a historic crisis, we have some reservations. We can never improve upon God. We can never improve upon the divine plan of human life. As a school of character, as an arena for the development of heroic qualities, as a sphere for mighty conflicts and great victories, you can't beat the hard job of human life as it is put up to every man of us every day. And we can never improve on the Christian revelation—the Fatherhood of God, who, like a good earthly father, does not answer all our questions at once, keeps from us many a secret, seems to leave us alone that we may grow up into the full use of our powers, and solve the problems he commits to us: the glory of the incarnation, God manifest in the flesh; the wonder of the Cross, the light of God on the mystery of sin and suffering; the Holy Spirit, God not in a distant heaven, but in us, His power and peace offered to us; and the resurrection, the glorious answer to the hopes and fears and eternal questionings of man, "If a man die, shall he live

again?" But there are two things we can all do that are supremely worth while; and the first is essential to the second.

1. We can immensely improve on the ordinary brand of Christian. The ordinary Christian is a man with remnants of faith big enough to remove mountains of difficulty and opposition if put seriously to work, but with a smug, complacent life which, advancing at full steam, would not move a self-respecting pinhead. He is a man who has never been made uncomfortable by Jesus Christ; as a rule, the first thing Jesus did with men in whom he saw the finest possibilities was to make them uncomfortable. "Take up your cross, sell all that thou hast, deny yourself." "Let the dead bury their dead." "I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." The ordinary Christian is in entire sympathy with the bringing in of the kingdom of God on earth by other people. That is the business of preachers, missionaries and the senior sisterhood. But he has never definitely linked his life with any serious effort to put the teaching of Jesus into practice, to hasten the day when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. A worker among foreign students recently said that he knew of forty young Chinese who had accepted Christianity in China but renounced it on seeing it at work, or not at work,

in America. These students had been in contact with the ordinary Christian.

2. The other thing. We can immensely improve upon the world as it is to-day. We can make it a much better place for all the sons of God to live in. In one view this is very easy, for things, it would seem, cannot be much worse than they are at the moment. But it is really a job staggering with difficulty, for the forces of reaction and cynical materialism are strongly and deeply intrenched. They tell us that American idealism is a perilous illusion, that "commerce rules the world in peace and war," to quote one of our American statesmen, and that "America went into the war to save its hide," to quote another. Of course the pessimist has always been with us. Viscount Bryce in his book on "Modern Democracies," the crowning achievement of a great life, says, "The saddest memories of political life are of moments at which one had to stand by when golden opportunities were being lost, to see the wrong thing done when it would have been easy to do the right thing. But this observation," says Mr. Bryce, "was made by a Persian to a Greek at a dinner party before the battle of Platæa twenty-four centuries ago, and the world has nevertheless made some advances since then." To think of opportunity to-day is to be magnificently optimistic. It is to realise that there has

never been such a time in which to invest a life. Think of it that two out of every three persons in the world still can neither read nor write. Think of it that were you taken sick in vast areas of the world to-day the wisest treatment given you would still be that of sorcery and incantations. Think of it that of the billion, six hundred million persons said to be in the world to-day, a billion are untouched by Christian civilisation, possible helpers every man of them in the making of a better world, possible enemies of all that is high and noble in human society. Think of it, too, that in our so-called Christian America vast multitudes still think it "the thing" to get all you can and do the least you can. Surely in a day like this no man will conceive that he thinks of his life in large enough terms, if his purpose be simply to make money or to have a good time, though for one I depreciate neither. Surely there will be many men who, like Agassiz, will be too busy to make money, who will give themselves in some worthy sphere of service to the rediscovery and reapplication to our disordered and divided human society of those fundamental principles under which groups and nations can live together in peace and progress. They are not to be found, believe me, in any new philosophy, in any new scheme of political reconstruction. For one, I believe they are all to be found in the New

Testament, in those teachings which need only to be put into action to achieve the results for which earnest men everywhere are praying—teachings such as these, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth"; "Whosoever wills to save his life shall lose it, whosoever wills to lose his life shall find it." And this, "No man liveth to himself." Yes, and no nation liveth to itself; in the intimacies and intricacies of the modern age the thing simply cannot be done.

"Lord, to whom shall we go" in this perplexed and troubled time? If civilisation is to survive, we will have to come back with new sincerity and thoroughness to the old faith of the fathers, reinterpreted doubtless in the light of modern knowledge and modern needs, ever growing to finer things, but the same in its sublime conception of every man's life as a trust from God, an opportunity for the eternities, the same in its fundamental loyalty to the will of God and the weal of men as perfectly revealed only in Jesus Christ. For "Thou hast the words of eternal life."

Chapter IV

The Modern Saint

Beloved of God, called to be saints.
—Romans 1:7.

Saint is a good word gone wrong. The saints in New Testament times were simply the sincere friends and forceful followers of Jesus. To-day we think of a saint as one who has already been translated to heavenly spheres, and so we sing "For all the saints who from their labours rest." Or we think of a saint as a sanctimonious person, extreme and extremely unpleasant, addicted to pious phrases without reality, unctuous, other-worldly, depressing, a perpetual wet blanket on everything normal and wholesome. Or, in a better sense, we think of a saint as a marvellously good person, usually one's grandmother or maiden aunt, greatly respected, representing an ideal of life which we realise to be beautiful and lofty, but one somehow altogether too good for this world, at least for practical persons such as most of us are. Or we think of a saint, once more, as Mr. Coventry Patmore does, as one who impresses us by his harmlessness, his lack of appreciation of modern humour, his ignorance of many things

which every well-informed person is supposed to know, and his having no use for his time when he can put it to our service. "On the whole," says Mr. Patmore, "the saint gives you an agreeable impression of general inferiority to yourself." With some such view most of us at some time have said, "Of course I do not pretend to be a saint;" or "A man can't be a saint in my business," and the like. And there, with an air of finality, we have left the matter.

Now I am not specially interested in the depreciation of a word. Indeed I would incline to be suspicious of the man who addressed a letter to-day "To the Saints at Philadelphia"—it would probably go to the dead-letter office. There is no more seductive foe of the soul than a word often on the lips which has lost contact with the living realities of the mind. But though not at all concerned about the word, I am profoundly interested in the spiritual and eternal realities for which it stood in New Testament times. Let us see what some of these were.

First and fundamental among them is the idea that human life is, every bit of it, a sacred thing. By this I do not mean that it is a solemn thing. Oliver Wendell Holmes used to say that he would probably have been a minister if the minister who called at his father's home when he was a boy had not looked and talked so much like an under-

taker. I mean rather that life is a thing of infinite meaning and of priceless value, and that a man can only discover this meaning and value in God. The saint stood in olden times as one consciously not his own to do with his life as he would, but God's to fulfil an eternal purpose. Paul is a good example of the saint, and many of his words give us perfectly the ideal of life involved—"Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price"; "I am debtor"; "I have a stewardship entrusted to me"; "Not I, but Christ"; "Know ye not that ye are the temple of the living God"; "We are workers together with God"; "Called according to the eternal purpose of God"—these are magnificent expressions of a life which has discovered itself in God.

The opposite point of view is represented in the statement of the writer to the Hebrews regarding Esau, that he was a profane person. By this he does not mean that Esau used bad language, which is simply an evidence of a vulgar mind, or of a life out of control, but that his point of view was wholly secular and sensuous. God was nowhere on his horizon. His supreme authority was the impulse of the moment, his supreme good the thing he wanted now. Nowhere is the antithesis of saintliness better pictured than in this passion-driven, irresponsible youth, who, despising his birthright, cries, "Feed me with that red pottage.

Satisfy my appetites. Give me what I want. My birthright, what do I care for that? Let me have to-day what I want to-day. Let to-morrow take care of itself." It was the mood of multitudes of men and women in the easy, prosperous days preceding the war, a mood it is to be feared to which many are reacting to-day. To it none are more susceptible than those to whom, in the strange allotment of life's possessions and opportunities, most has been given, our young men and women who have been coddled in the cradle of self-will and fondled in the lap of luxury, who do what they want, when they want, how they want, resentful of all restraint, indifferent to all authority, swayed hither and thither by the mood of the moment, the fads and foibles of the world's cheap conventions. Oh, how it cheapens and degrades the greatness of a human life!

Your life, then, is a sacred thing, forever hallowed by the creative touch of God. His thought is in it, His hand upon it; indeed His work is incomplete until your life is linked with it, and loyal to it. All days are sacred, one of them set apart for emphasis upon the fact, and we need this emphasis to-day. Business is sacred; the supremely important thing is not what a man is making or how much he is making, but what his business is making of him and of those who share it with him. Money is sacred. "It is God that

hath given thee power to get wealth." You are not its owner, but its steward. If you think you own it, if you forget the silent partner in the business, you do not own your money; it owns you. Pleasure is sacred—I believe God means us to have lots of good times—its great function to rest and refresh, and send us with eager step to the doing of some bit of work that is worth doing and that can only be done in God's strength. "Aggressive fighting for the right," Mr. Roosevelt used to say, "is the greatest sport the world knows."

A second thought at the heart of this old word is the thought of separation. The life of the man who recognises his life to be a sacred thing is different from that of the man to whom life is only a bargain or a game. But it is not the separation of conscious superiority or of social exclusiveness, or anything of that sort. It is a separation which is essential, in the very nature of things, growing out of a fundamental difference of outlook and inlook. In two historic forms this element in the saintliness of the ages has expressed itself. There was the separation of monasticism, which led men to withdraw themselves from the world and in some quiet place give themselves to the cultivation of a state of mind. And the world owes much to monasticism, for in barren ages of the spirit it kept alive the realities of religion, and did great

service in the preservation and translation of the Scriptures. Then there was the separation of the Puritan which surrounded life with negations, which said the Christian must not dance, or play cards, or read novels, or go to the theatre, which made the Sabbath a day of gloom.

Both these forms of separation have largely passed from the thought of men. A better appreciation of the intense humanity of Jesus, never to be forgotten in emphasis upon His divinity, and of His hearty participation in the joys of life, has done much to this end. The modern saint is a man among men; he is interested in the whole of life; his thought that of a devout Frenchman who said, "Beware of a religion which substitutes itself for everything—that makes monks. Seek a religion which penetrates everything"—everything human a point of contact with the eternal—"that makes Christians." But separation survives. Do not mistake it. There are no longer hard and fast lines. It is no longer possible to draw a line down the centre of the page and say, "All these things on one side are right, and all these are wrong." I cannot legislate for you, nor you for me. I do not know what it is from which you must separate yourself if you are to be a saint, a man living in the light of the Eternal. But you know, you know. It is that which makes it hard for you to live the life of prayer and of

service, easy to live on the material level, the thing that dims for you the vision of God, kills your higher impulses, chills the energies of your soul, and makes you content with a poor second best. It may be some habit of the mind, the critical spirit that picks flaws in everything and everybody; the cynicism that blinds one's eyes to the good; the discouragement that sinks into self and forgets God; the doubt that is simply a peg on which to hang a careless life. Or it may be some habit of the life, some sad survival of the animal in the man, some cheap and unworthy companionship, some weak surrender to environment. Whatever it be, to us all there comes to-day, as from the lips of God Himself, the old word, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate. Touch not the unclean thing, and I will be to you a father, and ye will be to me sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

A third note which the word saint sounded of old was that of purity—upon this the Hebrews put much emphasis. But the purity they had in mind was not a negative quality, separateness from sin, whiteness of soul; it meant positive obedience to the will and the ways of God. The saint was not only ceremonially clean, he was morally righteous. "Thou shalt" was as vivid to him as "Thou shalt not." It is just at this point that the modern saint has so often lost his power, and

that the religion it is his business to make real to men has seemed to break down. Somehow the qualities men associate with him are the negative qualities. He is notable for the things he does not do. And when in some great issue between right and wrong, between the way of self and the way of service, the call for courageous leadership and constructive effort is sounded, his has not always been the quick response. "Sinners were with me; saints were against me—strange contradiction in human nature"—this is a pathetic entry in the diary of the philanthropist, Lord Shaftesbury, as he tells of his efforts to improve the condition of the factory workers in England. How often it has been so!

Did it ever occur to you that a clean sheet would be the record of a sinful life? Think of drifting through a life in which such momentous issues and destinies are at stake and doing, or at least attempting, nothing that could be chronicled in the records of eternity. Yes, mere goodness without effectiveness, if such a thing be possible, is failure. And so the modern saint will not only be a man among men, pre-eminently he will be a man among men for men. To him the spirit of Jesus will be the rule of life, the programme of Jesus—"I am come that they might have life and have it more abundantly," the supreme business of life. In the world's work he

will be, if need be, a stern fighter for righteousness. As he does battle for better conditions in the home, in the community, in industry, in the state, his impelling motive will be not only devotion to human rights; in many an hour of discouragement about our human stuff the motive that more than all holds him to his task will be this, that the men and women and children for whom he works are saints, that their lives have value to God, and so that every condition that checks their growth, and crushes their spirit, and robs them of their chance for fulness of life is not only an economic wrong, it thwarts a divine plan, it is a defiance of the holy will of God.

Still another great quality of soul is wrapped up in the old word—one very much needed in these days—it is the assurance of victory. "Know ye not," says St. Paul, "that the saints shall judge the world?" That is to say, their standards are to be the dominant standards of mankind. To be on Christ's side is to be on the winning side. Paul was writing at the moment to a group of obscure and unimportant persons, mostly slaves, men sadly unawakened to the meaning of the faith they professed, men with their little grievances disposed to take their place as litigants in the scramble of human controversy. Think of it, cries St. Paul, you whose Christ-implanted ideals are yet to shape the life of mankind!—was

there ever such sublime optimism? But in just such confidence the leaders of the early church, despised, scoffed at, persecuted, lived. Because of it they ate their daily bread in gladness, and faced without a quiver the darkest experience that came to them, persuaded with Paul that nothing could separate them from the love of Christ, beholding with John an innumerable company of victors. There is nothing the modern saint needs so much as this. Without it every other quality in his soul is a hollow void. We have been attending mortuary exercises far too long, mourning over the decadence of faith, almost ready to inter the church of Christ. Could anything be more absurd? Think of the outlook to-day compared to that day when our great Master dared to say, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away," or when Paul anticipated confidently the triumph of Christ. To-day everything else has been tried, and is ready for the discard, save as it is made new in Christ. To-day all over the world men are crying out for something, they hardly know what, which only Christ can give them. To-day the man the world needs above all others is the modern saint, the man with the eternal sunshine on his face because he has rediscovered life in Christ. "Beloved of God, called to be saints." Eagerly and confidently take your place among the victors.

Chapter V

Electives in Life and the Supreme Choice

Therefore choose life.
Deuteronomy 30:19.
To me to live is Christ.
Philippians 1:21.

Browning speaks of "Life's business being just the terrible choice." One does not quite like the word "terrible" in this connection. But it is impossible to over-emphasise the importance of choice in the shaping of a life. There will be little question, I fancy, that we all have this power of self-direction, of decision between alternatives. Of course, there is a good deal of fatalism in everyday thought. It was especially active during the war; a man was perfectly safe unless the bullet coming his way had his number. And this view rightly applies not only to the circumstances of a man's death, to his illnesses and accidents, but to his entire experience from cradle to grave. Behind all our planning is a larger Plan which embraces in its scope all our possible choices. Just where the boundary between the direction of God and the freedom of man is to be found we do not know. Pity has been ex-

pressed for the man who has no contradictions in his scheme of things; the universe is too vast to be summed up in a syllogism. Christian teaching and Christian experience, however, clearly indicate that both direction and choice are in our human lot. Mr. R. H. Hutton made the interesting suggestion that it is in the realm of our choices that Providence operates. "The minds that are alive to every word of God, give constant opportunity for His divine interference with a suggestion that may alter the course of their lives; and like the ship which turns when the steersman's hand but touches the wheel, God can steer them through the worst of dangers by the faintest breath of feeling, or the lightest touch of thought." Here certainly is a fundamental sphere for the exercise of choice. There are difficulties in the way of belief in human freedom; indications that "our spoonful of existence is served out to us, and no questions asked as to how we like it." Then I choose to believe the best and the most about the powers with which God has endowed me. I choose to believe that I am made in the image of the living God, a sharer in His creative work, not a mere automaton responding to the pulling of a seraphic or satanic string.

Of course, there are limitations to the broad areas of choice. Many of our most important choices are made for us. We do not choose our

parents; what would some of us have been without the rare discretion with which they were chosen for us? There was a period, probably, when we counted them old-fashioned, quite behind the age, very nice, of course, but not to be taken too seriously. But we have come to see that their choices for us were built on the rock, ours for ourselves on the shifting sands. We do not choose our early friends, one of the most important of life's influences. We live on a certain street, we go to a certain school, and fateful friendships happen. We do not choose our country: suppose we had been born Kaffirs or Hottentots; would Christian civilisation seem to us a gift worth while, the arrival of the missionary a blessing or a curse?

The basic choices of life are made, commonly, before we are 25 years old. After that our choices are apt to be secondary, the inevitable result of primary choices long since made. If in years of youth I have chosen thoroughness and responsibility, to the end I will never balk at duty, difficulty or danger. If I have early chosen the easy way, if I have been content to give to the world a poor second best, my last breath, if it be in my power, will be an evasion, to the end I will be a shirk. True, to this limitation there is a limitation. The most glorious note of the gospel is its declaration that it is never too late to choose

again. The word of the Lord comes not only, as it came to Jonah, "the second time," but with marvellous patience the third and the fourth. I cannot retrace the false choices of the past, but there is never a time when I cannot make a new beginning with Him who is able to save to the uttermost.

Let it never be forgotten that the choice for which Christianity appeals is the choice of life. The devil's master lie is that to be a Christian is to limit joy and freedom, that to see life is to see the wreckage of life. There are but two spiritual kingdoms in one of which every man is a citizen, the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Self; and always the selfish spirit means the progressive narrowing of life's interest and influence. The business of living is the specialty of Jesus: he knows more about it than any other; he has made more of it in the experience of vast multitudes of men than any other. Every restriction which he seems to place upon it is in reality an immeasurable expansion; every negation the clearing of the ground for some splendid affirmation.

And so there is in life one choice that is greater than all, for it includes and determines all—the choice of Christ. To the Christian, Christ is God manifest in the flesh—all of God that can be packed into the limitations of our frail humanity.

What do we mean by the choice of Christ? Is it simply a pious phrase? I hope not, for the patter of pious phrases is just about the most deadly of the foes of spiritual reality. But the choice of Christ is not only the most important choice, but the greatest discovery of life. What does it mean?

1. It means, for one thing, the choice of a way. There is a story which has been very often told of the traveller in Switzerland who asked a small boy, "Where is Kandersteg?" The boy answered, "I don't know, sir, but that is the road." Now just that, the road, is what we need to know in life. On the journey of life we need guidance, direction, and Jesus says to us, "I am the Way." The early Christians were beautifully called not only "saints," men to whom all of life was sacred, and "disciples," men who were going to school with Christ, and "witnesses," men who were ready to stand up and say what they knew of him. They were also called "those of the Way" and strays and stragglers were spoken of as "out of the Way." There are many ways in life, some of them tempting and flower-strewn —the way of self-interest, the way of self-indulgence, the way of intellectual pride, "Except I see, I will not believe." But the way to which the choice of Christ brings us is the way of faith in God, of obedience to His will at any cost, the

way of prayer and of unselfish service. It is the King's Highway, and on it, as we trudge along, the King is with us. He knows it every inch, for He has been over it all the way.

2. Then the choice of Christ means the choice of the best and most intimate friend one can have in life. A Roman Catholic priest who has been anxious to bring me into "the true church" recently gave me a book entitled "The Friendship of Christ," and asked me to read it. Around this central thought of friendship with our Lord it weaves the whole intricate system of Roman doctrine. There is much truth mingled, as I see it, with much error. But this, I am sure, is true, that we could all of us make a healthy approach to genuine Christianity through the familiar doorway of friendship, friendship with Christ and friendship with men. Indeed I doubt if there is any way in which many of us can quite so readily make religion vital as by taking the rich gift of friendship with which God has endowed us, and consecrating it to the service of God and of men. As we do so, it will be well to remember the words of Christ to his friends, "I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." It will be well also to recall the most beautiful picture of friendship in all literature, as I conceive it, the Old Testament picture of Jonathan seeking out his friend

David when he is hunted like an outlaw from hill to hill, and we are told this of Jonathan that "he went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God." The thought in both passages is this, that the highest function of friendship is realised when, without strain or pose, without anything that savours of preaching, but in a perfectly natural way, my friendship is somehow teaching my friend what I know about God and the big realities of life, strengthening his grip upon them; and that which my friendship is doing in some poor degree for him, his is doing for me.

Now a friend may not be visibly present. Some of the most precious friendships of life are with friends who are no longer with us. Among the deepest desires of our hearts is that in any possible world we should never be ashamed to look them in the face. There are even friends whom one has never seen at all. Ruskin may be my friend, or Tennyson. But with these friends, as with those beside me every day, I must keep the laws of friendship. If we are to be friends, in some way contact must be maintained. I must think of them, or read what they have written, or be loyal to their teaching, and I must avoid friendships with which they cannot live. It is just so with Christ. Is it strange that He is so unreal even to professing Christians; how often do we think

of Him, with definite desire to learn of Him, to realise His presence, to take His way? I may begin by simply admiring Christ as a friend of long ago: but if I choose Him as a friend in the ways I have suggested, by and by I begin to find that His is the most vital and intimate and constant of all friendships. For I have chosen not simply a friend, but a Divine Master and Saviour, Whom to serve is to be free, Whom to follow is to have life at its best. And here is another exercise of the power of choice. For one I choose to have a great Christ who is *able* to do for the individual and the world exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, not a shrunken and attenuated Christ who must accommodate his processes to the limitations of my understanding, or I will have none of Him.

3. And then the choice of Christ means that we choose definitely the Christian programme. What that means we all know much more fully than we have yet put in action. It means the battle with sin and wrong wherever they are intrenched; it means the making over of this world, every bit of it, the nearest and the furthest, into the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ; it means, in the prophetic summary which Jesus made His own, the preaching of glad tidings to the poor, the healing of the broken-hearted—how many of them there

are to-day—the preaching of deliverance to the captives, the prisoners of habit, the prisoners of sin; the recovery of sight to the blind, the setting at liberty of them that are bruised.

The choice of Christ, how important! But there is something more important still, without which our choice will be vain—Christ's choice of us. "Ye have not chosen me," he said, "but I have chosen you that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." Christ is calling us all to be leaders, or helpers, in the greatest crusade of the ages in which there can be no failure because the battle is of the Lord.

Chapter VI

The Choice of a Lifework

> To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world that I should bear witness unto the truth.
>
> —John 18:37.

"Mamma," asked a small boy, "what is Uncle John for?" Uncle John was an attractive bit of bric-a-brac decorating the horizon of life, but without manifest destiny. There are all too many such lives; they do nothing worth while, they aim at nothing big and beautiful, they prove nothing. How different was the life of Jesus. His words constantly indicate a vivid sense of what He was here to do, and joy in setting Himself to do it. "I am come to do the will of Him that sent me." "I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly." "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." A definite task had been given Him, a great responsibility reposed in Him by One whose will was as His meat: life must be made a richer thing for all who crossed His path; the real values of a human life, its worth to God and the universe, its

crucial choices and ultimate destiny must to them be made clear. The choice of a lifework, the shaping of a life-purpose, is a matter of tremendous interest and importance not only to young people, but to their parents and friends who have the great opportunity and responsibility of wisely influencing their decisions.

1. Let me say at the beginning that I have a great deal of sympathy for the man who in this matter cannot quite see his way, and does not know what to do. There are men who from very early years know what they will do, and go by a straight course to a sure goal: but there are others who drift uncertainly from plan to plan, and suffer many things of themselves and of others ere at last their feet touch rock. In such uncertainty a man may be in an honoured fellowship. Huxley again and again thought of giving up science. The long struggle had taught him the full extent of his powers, but seemed to end by denying him all opportunity for their use. Years after he had written "Lohengrin" Wagner, in great poverty, stared at as a madman, caricatured by the press, thought he ought to give up the attempt to be a composer, and talked of going to India as a tutor. With the death of George Herbert's court hopes, his biographer says, his true life may be said to have begun. Dickens expected to be an actor. He had an appointment with

Mathers and Kemble to try out his histrionic gifts. Unfortunately when the day came he had a bad cold, and an inflammation of the face. He was bitterly disappointed, and proposed to make another appointment next season. In the meantime he had a chance to make a beginning in journalism. "See," he remarks, "how near I may have been to quite another sort of life." Oliver Goldsmith found himself without a shilling after having obtained his doctor's degree. He pounded drugs, Macaulay says, and ran about London with phials for charitable chemists. He aspired to the unambitious post of mate to a naval hospital, and presented himself at Surgeon's Hall as an applicant. An old record in the college book reads, "James Bernard, mate to an hospital. Oliver Goldsmith, found not qualified for ditto." Goldsmith was utterly disheartened. In his discouragement he seized a pen and began to write. Eight years later came from his pen "The Vicar of Wakefield." King Edward the Seventh, bound to the difficult business of being a king, confessed to his friends that if he had had his choice, he would have liked to be a landscape gardener. Edward Everett Hale thought to enter the United States Navy. President Eliot of Harvard escaped from a cotton mill. When the church was proposed to Robertson of Brighton, he answered, "Anything but that": he wanted to be a soldier, and to the

end of his days the marching of a company of redcoats stirred his soul to the depths. Horace Bushnell was a newspaper man, then planned to enter law and politics; when the revival at Yale broke out he was the one tutor who held aloof, yet out of that revival was to come the great preacher who was to illustrate so wonderfully his own sermon, "Every Man's Life a Plan of God." Phillips Brooks was an utter failure as a teacher. At twenty the headmaster of the school in which he was teaching told him he would never succeed in anything. He sought the advice of a friend as to how he could earn a living. The friend said to him, "Let us look at the matter by a process of elimination. There are some things you could never do. For instance, with that stammer of yours you could not be a minister." Whether this was the challenge which sent him into the ministry resolved to conquer his handicap we do not know. In June of the year he went to the theological seminary this man, surely one of God's richest gifts to America, wrote, "I have not yet any plans for the fall, but shall not study a profession. I do not know exactly what will become of me, and do not care much." "My future is as usual all in the clouds," wrote Henry Drummond in his twenty-fifth year. "Everything is as dark as ever." All these great souls went out into life like Abraham of old; not knowing whither they went.

Two foundation stones the man in the dark about the structure of his life would do well to lay. The one is to be sure that his supreme desire is to do what God wants him to do: the other to see to it that he is making the most of the opportunities of to-day. Then he may anticipate confidently that Charles Kingsley's great saying will be fulfilled in him, "Have your tools ready, and God will find you work."

It is important, too, to be sure, that one's life-purpose is big enough for the facts of life. The nephew of Dr. Gunsaulus of Chicago asked him one day what text he was taking for the next Sunday. He answered, "To this end was I born, and for this purpose came I into the world." "Uncle," said the young man, "why do you suppose I was born?" "I am sure I don't know," said his uncle, realising that that is a thing which every man must find out for himself. "Neither do I," said the nephew, and he went away puzzling over the problem. As he walked through the streets, the alarm of fire was sounded, and he was carried along with the crowd until he came to the building which was in flames. It was a theatre crowded with people. Instantly the young man plunged into the burning building and dragged out one person after another till he saved thirteen. Once more he rushed in, but this time was struck by a falling beam and carried out terribly

injured. His uncle came to see him as he lay dying in the hospital and as he bent over his head he heard him say, "Uncle, to this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world—that I might save these thirteen people." Some weeks afterwards Dr. Gunsaulus was in London, and as he was sitting in his hotel, a man came up to him and began talking about the fire in the Chicago theatre. "I was in that fire," he kept repeating. "I was in that fire. I fought for my life, but I saved myself, I saved myself." Which of the two men had a purpose big enough for the facts of life? Which had really lived—the man who being dead yet speaks, or the man who, living, is long since, in the big things of the soul, dead and buried?

2. To serve God and humanity, it is not necessary for a man to be a minister or a missionary. Thomas Arnold of Rugby wrote to one of his boys, "I am much interested in your decision as to a profession. I do not like to influence you overmuch, only be sure of this, that whatever your decision, it does not matter much if you only follow our great common calling, the service of Christ." There is tremendous need to-day of Christian business men who will keep uppermost the human side of business and who will rejoice to devote the wealth they make to human service. There is tremendous need of Christian statesmen,

who will make the business of government decent, and decently intelligent: of Christian diplomatists who will make forever impossible the old definition of a diplomat as one who lies abroad for his country, whose genius it will be to exercise among the nations the ministry of reconciliation. There is great need of Christian doctors, Christian lawyers, Christian editors. But almost all these callings are crowded. Somebody will make, if you do not, the money you would like to make, and public sentiment will make more and more necessary the devotion of large parts of it to human service. Good doctors and lawyers are tumbling over each other in our great cities. More and more public sentiment will force an improvement in the calibre of the men who serve in politics and in diplomacy. But

3. There is a tremendous dearth of strong men in the Christian ministry, and the whole future, not simply of the church (for the church if it fulfils its function never exists for itself) but of Christian civilisation depends in large degree upon the response which is made by the high-minded young men of to-day to this need. Many men who have high purposes hesitate to enter the ministry, and many nominally Christian parents counsel them against it, whereas in generations past and in many lands, such as my own native Scotland, the highest honour of which any family

could conceive, for which they were willing to make almost any sacrifice, was that one son at least should enter the ministry. It is a fact that more men have come to greatness from the country manses of Great Britain and the United States than from homes of any other kind. Yet the headmaster of one of the greatest schools in America said lately that during his ten years' association with the school not a single graduate had entered the ministry. Similar testimonies could easily be multiplied. Among the reasons for this condition is the delusion on the part of many people that the ministry in these days is not quite a man's job, that the minister is a sort of male appendage to the Ladies' Aid Society, that his chief associates are likely to be amiable old ladies of both sexes, that he must lack that reasonable measure of intellectual freedom which every man craves, that he can neither say what he believes nor believe profoundly what he is expected to say, that he will be humiliated by many experiences on the material side of life, and that in the end he and his dear ones are quite likely to starve to death. I would be false to myself if I did not say that the greatest debt of which I am conscious in life, save that only to the dear ones of the home, is the debt I owe to the one friend [1] who when every

[1] The late Rev. Donald Sage Mackay, D.D., LL.D., minister of the Collegiate Church, Fifth Avenue and 48th Street, New York.

one else advised me against entering the ministry, persistently counselled me to do so, and opened the way to make it possible. In three parishes, in country, suburb and city, I have never found the least restriction upon my intellectual freedom, and while many ministers are shamefully underpaid, some of us get all we are worth, and some a good deal more. The underpaid preacher and the underpaid teacher are among the pitiful instances of lost sense of proportion in our time. Fortunately business men on both sides of the ocean are awaking to the peril to the whole future of humanity that is involved in this false emphasis.

It should be said, of course, that there is no profession in which a man can be more miserable than in the ministry—if he should enter it, for instance, to please his grandmother, or if his thought of retaining his intellectual integrity is to "scare" the aforesaid grandmother by showing her that all the thinking of earlier centuries is so much junk, that everything worth knowing has been discovered since he went to college; if he be not emancipated from the lust of money, and cannot conceive what Agassiz meant when he said he was too busy to make money; if he be a professional parson in whom spirituality has run to starch, in whom familiarity with sacred things has bred not contempt, but entire complacency, who

can go into the pulpit as glibly as he would go into a reception room. Such a man will be very miserable in the ministry, and if he should be so unfortunate as to have a whine in his voice or a grouch in his soul, he will probably make everybody else miserable too. He had much better aim to run a bank, or a railroad, or some other of the lesser jobs of life. But if he be a man who is daring enough to desire no lesser province than God and the universe, the human soul and human society: if he know something at first hand of sin and struggle and sorrow: if he have a humble but vital faith that there is in One he has come to know, the living Christ, a response, the one adequate response to all the needs of men and of society: if he count it treasure beyond estimate to be a sharer in the joys and sorrows of his fellows, bringing to them the ministries of comfort, and courage and hope, to go with men and women through the dark, testing experiences of life as in some degree a trusted friend: if he rejoice to be with all he is and has, a humble worker for the Kingdom and the King, then I know no profession which to-day offers such opportunities and such true spiritual rewards as the Christian ministry. Fathers and mothers who discourage their splendid sons from entering it not only imperil the future of Christ's church; in my judgment they commit nothing less than a crime against God and

humanity. For the world's greatest need in the confusion of this time is spiritual leadership.

"God," said old Thomas Goodwin, the Puritan, "had but one Son, and He made Him a Minister."

Chapter VII

What Is the Matter with the Church?

> Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself up for it.
>
> —Ephesians 5:25.

One of the most hopeful things in this troubled time is that so many people are critical of the church. Many of the critics, of course, are not to be taken too seriously. They are out of sympathy with the church because they are foreigners in the world of the spirit; they dislike worship because they dislike to be reminded that the enduring values of life are quite different from those to which they give most heed; faring sumptuously and clothed gorgeously every day it is not pleasant to be told that one is a pauper in the coinage of heaven. The critics I have in view are the great company of men and women "whose hearts are aflame to be right," who are looking eagerly for a rallying-place for all true and earnest souls who have the needs of the shattered and hate-torn world on their hearts as a daily and intensely personal burden, but who somehow are not reminded by the average church of Jesus Christ, His

spirit, and His programme. What is the matter with the church?

There are those who tell us that what is needed is a new statement of the essentials of Christian faith, some up to date formula which will make the things we really believe vivid and vital, and unite all schools of thought upon it. And such restatement is always good—simply as an intellectual discipline, and in the interest of clear thinking, nothing is better than to put an old thing in a new way: always religion must be contemporaneous as well as historic, the truth of the ages must speak in the language and touch intimately the life of to-day. But probably there is not genius enough in the world to construct such an all-inclusive formula. The hunt for a formula may safely be left to the diplomats: the programme has not enough red blood in it to transform the world. Others tell us that what is needed is a radical reconstruction of the wonderful Society whose foundation was proclaimed by Him who said of Peter's testimony, "Upon this rock I will build my church." And reconstruction, of course, is good. The "as usual" must come increasingly under suspicion: a finer and more adequate superstructure must be built on the one foundation. But that which is needed more than revision or reconstruction, as it seems to me, is readjustment. I think of the church in one view

as a vast and intricate mechanism in a thousand parts, each in its place, and each essential to the whole: but somehow it does not go, or goes feebly by fits and starts, and here and there are men tinkering with a part, trying vainly this or that: but by and by there comes a master mind, a master hand makes one or two simple adjustments, part to part, each made for the other (why did not men see it before?) and the great thing begins to beat and throb with life and power. Or I think of the church, as Phillips Brooks once did, as an orchestra tuning up, a great theme in its heart, the greatest of the ages; and to-day only a jangle of dreadful discord is heard as each instrument goes its own wild way; but presently there is sounded the keynote, and to it each instrument is adjusted, and the very music of Heaven searches the souls of men. There is but One who can sound the keynote aright to-day; would God that His servants everywhere might hear it and take the pitch only from Him.

It is well to recognise, of course, that there are some things which cannot be adjusted and ought not to be. For instance, you cannot wisely adjust an empty church to a crowded community by simply filling the church. Any man of glib tongue can do that if he will pay the price—cheapening himself and his gospel. In England the counsel of despair has recently been given (not very seri-

ously, I hope) that the six back seats, usually the popular seats by the way, be reserved for smokers. An Episcopal rector in Connecticut believes that he has solved the problem of non-churchgoing by introducing rocking-chairs instead of stiff-backed pews. In my own church I have an honoured member who believes that cathedral chairs in place of pews would be a long step toward the kingdom of heaven. These are simply extreme instances of the expedients to which men resort at times in the effort to get an audience worthy of their gifts. But all such expedients are apt to leave out of view two fundamental teachings of Holy Scripture. One is that when God wanted a big thing done in olden time, he was never afraid of having too few people to do it, he seems to have been desperately afraid of having too many. Remember Gideon. "The people that are with thee are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me saying, Mine own hand hath saved me." And there was David. Our religious statisticians, whose blanks some of us commit almost daily to the waste basket, might do well to post prominently in their offices the first verse of the 21st chapter of First Chronicles, "And SATAN provoked David to number Israel." The other forgotten teaching of Scripture is that when Jesus saw fine possibilities of

service in a man his first thought seems to have been to make him uncomfortable. Chief seats, upper rooms, great rewards if you come with me. No, rewards will come, but first deny yourself, take up your cross. The church that will make the deepest impress on the life of the community in the new day is not the large church because it is large, but the church that is thoroughly and progressively Christianised.

Then again one cannot wisely adjust the Christian programme to the social and economic programme by eliminating everything that is distinctively Christian. There is a fundamental difference of emphasis in the two programmes. The one is mainly concerned with things, its terminology wages, hours of labour, sanitation, housing, savings banks, libraries, hospitals, all tremendously important matters affecting intimately yet never necessarily conditioning the life of the spirit. The Christian programme makes supreme a relation within—God to man, man to God, man to man—a relation which when thorough and complete touches and transforms every human interest and contact. One cannot wisely adjust the church to the world by living and speaking on the lower level, by keeping in the background that which is the centre and source and redeeming power of all. As one plans any adjustment which is really surrender, there comes the voice

of Him who said, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesseth." "Who made Me a judge and divider among you?"

Has not Jesus made very clear the one fundamental adjustment which is needed? Christianity is the religion of love. It was in amazement and admiration, not in scorn and cynicism, that men said of old, "Behold how these Christians love one another." If Paul could speak to us to-day, he would enumerate all other human virtues as we see them and say, "Though I have all these, without love I am nothing. Love never faileth" (which does not mean that love always works its way at once, but that love never gives up, never ceases to try, never thinks its task either complete or impossible). If the Church of Christ is to meet the needs and opportunities of the new age, its first readjustment must be not in the direction of more adequate machinery, new methods, better organization, but MORE LOVE. If the inoculation takes, an immediate result will be the elimination of certain very prominent and bitter controversies which have injured and are injuring greatly to-day the life of the Church, destroying its unity and perpetuating its divisions. "What!" it may be asked, "if we Christians begin really to love another, shall we all think alike?" God forbid! It would be a most uninteresting world. But all bitter-

ness will pass from our differences, all calling of names—Rationalist, Enemy of the Faith, Reactionary, Mossback—all aloofness and suspicion because we do not see quite alike, all deliberate misjudgment. Indeed instinctively we will look, as Jesus did, for the good in others, emphasising more the points on which we agree than the things on which we differ. For the thing that breaks one's heart, the pathos and tragedy of the whole situation is that so often men who stand apart in opposite camps, perhaps within a single church, throwing bricks at each other in God's name, refusing to see any good in each other, are so often each of them wholeheartedly devoted to and zealously seeking to conserve some interests that are of priceless value, interests which if they could only all of them be fitted into the visible fabric of Christ would immeasurably enlarge the thought and life of the Church. For one I believe that one of the greatest bits of service to be done by thoughtful men to-day is to exercise the ministry of reconciliation within the Church: it is, in perfect loyalty to the truth, to bring into bold relief the underlying unities beneath many of our controversies, to show that opposing groups are not really contradictory, but complementary.

Here, for instance, are varied views of the Bible, its origin, its authority, the nature of its

inspiration. What controversies have centred, and still centre here, more in America than in Great Britain! What branding of men as literalists or reactionaries, with a damning sneer, because, forsooth, one reads Job or Jonah as history, another as a parable with priceless spiritual teaching for every time, because the reading of one discovers one Isaiah, of another two or three. Is it not possible that each is conserving some interest of priceless value to the individual and to the Church? To the one the Bible is every word the Word of God, each part of equal value and authority: his interest to conserve in the fulness of its power the Book which is a lamp to his feet and a guide to his path, and which for the Church is the supreme standard of faith and practice. The other responds very eagerly to that clause which our Lord seems to have added to the great commandment. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy mind"; he cannot conceive that a man must ever surrender his intellectual integrity to be a Christian; reading history, he finds that the Church has constantly resisted new views of truth, driven out and even put to death its champions, clinging as long as it could, and as events have often shown longer far than it should, to the traditional. The dominant interest of this man is not to conserve a dogma, but to save for Christ and the Christian

faith men to whose God-given minds the old view has become impossible. To him the Bible is not so much a single deposit of truth fixed and final, as a growth, a progressive revelation of the will of God given to saintly men in varied times in varied experiences, its inspiration not so much a thing of words as of events, an unfolding history in which the ways of God and the folly and self-deceit of Godless men are progressively revealed, an inspiration not so much of words as of men in whom, each with his own bent of mind, his favorite words and modes of expression, his human frailties, the mind of God is progressively made known as they are able to receive and transmit it, until at last in Jesus Christ there is uttered the one unfailing Word of God who became flesh and dwelt among us. To the one the Bible is verbally infallible: to the other it is spiritually infallible, the man who opens his heart to its treasures will inevitably be led into the Way, into the Truth, into the Life. Surely such men, all supremely loving Christ, devoted to His service, each feeding his soul upon the sacred Scriptures, ought never to be severed by differences as to origins of books and the methods of God in revelation. Could anything be more unfortunate than the effort to make such questions a test issuing in bitter divisions?

There is the matter of social service to which

I referred a moment ago. In some of our judicatories the champion of social service, commonly so-called, gets rather an unsympathetic hearing: he is counted a dangerous man, carried away by his sympathies, a man of muddled mind and impoverished gospel, inclined to confuse soup kitchens with salvation and bad housing with original sin. When he has presented his case, some brother with strong lungs and a rich vocabulary of threadbare phrases is quite likely to arise and rend him to pieces amid the applause of the majority. Possibly he may deserve to be thrown to the lions, but more likely his only offence is this, that while one group is sensitive for the preservation of the gospel in its purity, he represents another group, weeping with Jesus over the city, sensitive for the application of the gospel to the whole broad sweep of human life. Surely both are necessary. Is it not largely a matter of approach? Shall we deal with the symptoms of disease in the world, or go after the disease, which is plain old-fashioned sin, human life in God's world without God? If I mistake not our Lord has given us in one instance at least suggestive guidance upon this matter. When the man sick of the palsy was brought to him, the critics of Jesus wanted him to deal with a symptom, for it was the physical wreck of a sinful life that was before him. But with his usual

thoroughness Jesus went at once to the root of the trouble, and the man who lay before him knew it, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." But to me the suggestive thing is that Jesus, having laid bare the root of the malady, and done his work of love there, did deal with the symptom, and gave his reason for so doing. "That ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, then said he to the sick of the palsy, Take up thy bed and walk." Most men, he knew, live on the surface of things, they do not look beneath, and so he used the treatment of the symptom as evidence of the great spiritual realities which with him were always supreme. That men may know when you and I talk of the Fatherhood of God, of the cross of Christ, of prayer, of grace to help in every time of need, of Heaven—that men may know that these things are real and vital, many a day we must be bringing to them such a treatment of the surface symptoms of sin and selfishness, such a radical change in the whole conditions of life as Jesus did when he said to this poor man, Take up thy bed and walk. It is just because the church has so often forgotten the evidential value of the love of God throbbing through the love of men, the evidential value of Christian homes, Christian business, Christian government, it is because we have so often forgotten that the soul is a social organism,

and that a man is never saved until he is saved in every relation of his life, because glibly talking of the disease we have left the symptoms to the devil, it is because of this that great multitudes count the spiritual realities of which we speak fiction and farce, and do not believe in the church because they do not believe in us who constitute it.

In controversy each age has its own test questions. At one period a question sometimes asked of students for the ministry was "Are you ready to be damned for the glory of God?" which was really a much better question than it sounds, for it aimed to bring out the deep motive in the young man's heart, not his aptitude in theological gymnastics. In my youth the questions asked concerned commonly the historicity of Jonah's experience with the great fish, and the standing-still of the sun. To-day the crux frequently comes when the young man is asked whether he believes in the virgin birth of our Lord. In some cases he answers that he does not deny but, owing to the different views of scholars on the subject, prefers not to affirm. I have not myself had difficulty in accepting the virgin birth: when one comes to the miracles "through Jesus Christ" nothing about Him is impossible, nothing incredible simply on account of its marvellousness. But I do not find that this doctrine makes any

distinct contribution to religious experience; the primary thing is not that by a certain physical process the Christ of God came to this world, or left it, but that He has been here, still more that He is here now. I cannot feel that the Deity of our Lord is finally involved in this question; to conceive that the redemptive work on earth of God who is a Spirit is necessarily conditioned by any physical process would seem to be materialism in one of its most harmful forms. Nor does the essential veracity of the Bible seem to be involved. Reading the Scriptures, listening to Jesus as He walks and talks, looking at the sunset and the stars and the flowers, I have always thought of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ not only as the Infinite Creator, but as the greatest by far of the Poets. Were I compelled to acknowledge, which I do not anticipate, that the virgin birth was "a first century way of accounting for the uniqueness of Jesus," the only change would be that certain very precious narratives which I have read hitherto as history I would read with equal gratitude and response as sublime utterances through inspired men of the Divine Poet, marvellous adaptations of ultimate spiritual reality to the groping minds of men. Moreover, I recall that in the human limitations which He took upon Him for us men and our sins our Lord said once that there was one thing

He did not know (Mark 13: 32). I cannot think that humble and earnest followers of His, quite definite in their acknowledgment of Him as their personal Lord and Saviour, who incline to reach slowly final conclusions upon certain ultimate questions of being and destiny far beyond human ken, would thus offend Him. Jesus did not call on men to accept certain propositions quite beyond the range of their experience, but to live a life of obedience to Him; faith was trustful co-operation with God. He did not ask Peter whether he believed that He had risen from the dead with the same body in which He suffered, He asked him whether he loved Him. He did not ask His disciples whether they believed in His miracles; He told them to go out and work miracles. (I verily believe that His disciples would work miracles to-day if they stopped quarrelling about them.) The whole controversy is a tragedy of false emphasis. To be well equipped for its work the Church needs both the forward look of its liberals, ever anticipating "new light and truth," ever zealous to hold for Christ and the Church men and women whose faith is beset by sincere intellectual difficulties, and the effective "brake" of its conservatives, contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, and fearful lest the faith of great multitudes of humble Christians should be disturbed.

But the essential of all essentials is that both should manifest to the world the love of Christ, and nothing will so effectively conceal that love as the bitterness of divisive controversy.

Here again is a controversy to which the war has given a strange revival, as to the second coming of our Lord. On the one side are sincere followers of His who are waiting eagerly for His coming: a study of the prophetic Scriptures and of modern events in their light leads them to believe that He is coming very soon in clouds of glory; their whole thought is shaped by this conviction. Others do not so interpret the Scriptures: many of the ancient prophecies, as it seems to them, have already been fulfilled: the study of times and seasons does not much interest them; they recall how many dates for the visible coming of Christ have already been fixed, but in vain: to them the gropings of men into the ultimate mysteries of God are confusing and harmful: they recall that "in the hour that ye think not," not in the hour that ye think, "the Son of man cometh." But they, too, are waiting for our Lord, every new day, every new experience a fresh approach of Christ to the soul. Shall these two groups sever themselves in mutual recrimination, one counting the other dangerous fanatics, the other insisting that as education without Godliness has brought the world to such a pass we shall

now try Godliness without education? Shall they not rather each wait quietly and trustfully in His own way, united in loving service? For surely the one thing for which Christ would care supremely if He came would be, not that his followers were all agreed in the interpretation of certain difficult Scriptures (which had they been "fundamental" would surely have been made more clear), but that He should find them all watching and working in love.

Or here is a controversy which in some of our cities has caused a good deal of conflict among churchmen—as to varied views of the Sabbath. The one school is sensitive for the preservation of the day of rest and worship in its purity and its power; the other sensitive for those multitudes of men and women and boys and girls in our great cities who are alienated from the church by its constant emphasis upon negations and restrictions. To the one the important word for our time is "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy"; to the other, "I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly." Surely such men ought to be able to find a basis of common contact and sympathy.

So with the sadly divisive controversy, responsible for so many rents in the garment of Christ, between the champions of apostolic tradition and the free churches. Are they not, each in their own

blundering way, pitifully blundering at times, both defending an interest of real import? Church union, when it comes, will not come by the discovery of some clever formula which each group can interpret in its own way, it will come when in all the churches there is such an ascendency of the spirit of Jesus that there will be an insistent seeking after mutual interpretation, an earnest desire to conserve, as far as may be, the heritage of the other group quite as much as the heritage of one's own group, a supreme passion to keep first things first. That there is in all our communions so large a number with whom this is a dominant interest is one of the great causes of hopefulness as one looks forward.

Were this fundamental adjustment of which I have been speaking made—MORE LOVE—many others would inevitably follow. Methods, so important, on which men centre so much thought, would matter less: for almost any method will work when it is dominated by the victorious spirit of Christ. The most important result would be that the Church would become attractive to men. Yes, Dr. Chalmers was right when he said long ago that "the main business with Christianity is to proceed upon it."

Chapter VIII

The Church and the International Mind

> God hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.
>
> —2 Corinthians 5 : 18.

The Church of Christ is not in politics; that is to say, it is not concerned with the controversies of parties or the ambitions of persons. But its sphere is the whole of life, nothing less; its specific task to make vivid in thought and controlling in action the principles which in a Christian civilisation must govern all human relations. If it fail to touch with redemptive power any bit of human life; if any group of relations—domestic, social, industrial, political, national or international—is untouched by its influence, in so far it fails of its function, in so far it fails in loyalty to its great Master, to whom nothing human was foreign.

We do well to remember that the supreme revelation of God to man in Jesus Christ had its roots in national life. To an early patriarch was given the challenging commission, "I will make of thee a great nation, and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." The prophets were pre-

eminently patriots; it was in no small part their keen insight into national conditions which gave them their unfailing foresight as to the inevitable issue. How they thundered against mere dependence upon human power, and against all compromising alliances that leave God out of the reckoning! To them history was the battleground of God. Wherever they looked they saw Him in action, working wondrously among the nations His triumphant will. When in the fulness of time Jesus came, great care was taken to bring Him into relation with this background of national history. He was the Son of God, but also the Son of David, Israel's king. And Paul, the greatest of His followers, calls himself an "Hebrew of the Hebrews."

At a very early date there seems to have sprung into action what one might call the supreme heresy of the ages, still very active among us, the false thinking, namely, that God has favourite children, and we are they. As the years passed, men responded ever more eagerly to the first part of the commission given to Abraham, "I will make of thee a great nation." But they forgot the sequel, "And in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." The book of Jonah was not written to tell the story of a whale. It was written to make vivid the fact that God's purpose of love embraces the foreigner. Paul had

to spend years wrestling with his prejudices in the discipline of the desert, Peter had to have a vision from heaven, before either was ready to believe that God's purpose of love concerned any one but the Jew. To-day many people seem to think, or live as though they thought, that the loving energies of God which of old sent His son to a cross, are now mainly concerned with seeing to it that Americans have plenty of money and a good time. The idea that He is interested in any one else, unless it be a sprinkling of British, the idea that to Him the black and the yellow man are as the white, is surely a reflection on the divine taste! But to us Americans there is coming to-day very vividly the old commission first given to Abraham, and never yet fully realised by any people. It may well be that Emerson is right when he speaks of America as perhaps the last great effort of Almighty God on behalf of humanity.

With this heresy, which would say, "Go to, let us build up our own nation," which asks with the dear old Boston lady, "Why do not these foreign governments take care of their own people?" a kindred heresy is rife among us, this namely, that sturdy patriotism and internationalism are mutually exclusive. The very word "internationalism" is anathema to many excellent people. They rank it with anarchism, socialism

—perhaps rheumatism, and many other "isms" which are altogether evil. But no. The Christian life, that is, the life growing into the mind of Christ, is a thing of ever broadening areas of interest and influence. It begins with the individual, concerned rightly with the development of his own powers and the shaping of his own life. Presently he marries, presently there comes to his home God's most beautiful gift to a man and a woman, a little child. Now he lives for them, thinks of them in all his planning. But because of his new relation he is not less an individual than he was, rather he is more of an individual, an individual with immeasurably larger areas of interest and effort; his loyalty to wife and child is a daily challenge to him to make the most of the talents God has committed to him, of the opportunities life is opening to him. Presently he awakens to his duty as a citizen. Perhaps he takes office—perilous business—or takes an earnest part in some civic or national movement. But if he be a Christian man, if his balance wheel be in operation, in all this he is not less loyal to his family than before. The very reverse. For serving the city, the state, the nation, he is serving the group of families of which his own is one, no one of which can have safety, health, education, fulness of life, save in those civic and national conditions for which, with

all his soul, he is at work. So the patriot is not the man who cries, "We are the people, and wisdom will perish with us." He is not the man whose supreme expressions of patriotism are noise, brag and bluster. He is not the man who shouts, "Let us look out for ourselves. Away with this foolish idealism. What have we to do with the rest of the world?" Rather he is the man who has the broadest vision of America's task and the most eager passion to make it real, the man who, if he say, "America first," means America first in national honour and diplomatic fair dealing, America first in bringing her mighty resources to the service of humanity, America first in daring adventures in peace.

Two illusions have been shattered by the war. One is that war breeds among men heroic virtues. True, at its challenge, many men and women did find in these recent days newness and greatness of life. But the losses were immeasurably greater than the gains. I am thinking now not of the cost of war in millions of lives and billions of treasure, but of the cost most of all in the delicate realm of personality, in the utter confusion of values which it brings in its path, in the heedlessness of life, the indifference to truth, the dreadful harvest of lawlessness which have so tragically resulted. The other illusion is that the way to have peace is to make ready for war.

Said Mr. Lloyd George not long ago, "It does not matter what treaties you sign, what pacts you enter into between nations, it makes no difference what leagues or associations you may found: if nations are armed against each other, war will ensue in the end."

In this era of conferences, in itself a happy omen, we do well to realise that world-peace will never come through the action of governments or through conferences, however good, save as these register the insistent and persistent decisions of peoples. We do well to realise, too, that there will be no lasting peace among the nations until there is peace in the nations with God. Everything else has been tried and failed. As healers of the wounds of the world, commerce, diplomacy, science, are broken reeds. The Christian programme of love for God expressing itself in love for man is the one redemptive force that with any thoroughness has not yet been tried. Here is where the individual counts tremendously. What can he do? We are too apt to think that world-peace is the business of statesmen and of great national leaders, a colossal task in which the ordinary man does not count. Some one has let his fancy picture a day in which it was solemnly agreed that men everywhere throughout the world at the same instant of time should all raise their voices in a common shout in the hope

that the people up in Mars would hear it and suitably respond. But when the hour came each man began to say to himself, "I want to hear that tremendous shout, but if I am myself bellowing at the top of my voice I won't hear a thing. Besides, my little piping voice won't count for anything in a noise like that." And so when the appointed moment arrived there was a silence on this earth such as the world had never known before! It is thus that men evade their responsibilities, forgetting that all great movements rise out of individual initiative and effort. In the business of world-peace what can the individual do?

1. We can each of us contribute one life of good-will to the world. King, president, statesman, general, can do no more. The great sources of war are those described in the fourth chapter of the general epistle of James. The trouble is that our so-called peace is so much like war. Every broken home, every severed friendship, every cherished antipathy, every persistent breach between employer and employé, every failure of men and women who call themselves Christians to live together in mutual sympathy and service, is as a blazing torch thrown into the stored dynamite of the world's hatreds. It is our contribution to the insanity of states.

2. We can each of us contribute one concili-

atory and interpretative mind to public opinion which is the ultimate force in a democracy. I do not mean of course by a conciliatory mind one lacking in strong convictions: God forbid. I mean a mind which, though staunch in its own carefully considered positions, yet recognises that truth is a many-sided thing, that wisdom is seldom the monopoly of one group, that antagonistic interests are usually a phase of shortsightedness; a mind which habitually projects itself into the other man's mind, to learn, if one can, how things look at his angle, eager to find the point of contact, ready as far as one consistently can to revise one's thinking to that end. In my thought no more pathetic public document has been issued in recent years than the statement sent from the White House by the late President Harding, himself a master of conciliation, when not long ago a general railroad strike was threatened. The pathetic thing was that, knowing the men concerned, the President should feel compelled to say, "Recognising that the labour group and also the managing group are in the nature of things partisans of the respective elements which they represent, the President felt that it was unnecessary to invite these two groups (into conference to which the representatives of the public were invited) because their attitude would necessarily be partisan in any consideration of wage

questions." When will our public men learn not merely that no one knows a subject who knows only one side, but that no man is a wise champion of any interest until he is sensitively fair to the other?

3. We can each of us support the agencies of good-will at work in the world. Chief among these is the Church of Christ, whose business is the ministry of reconciliation. And chief among the activities of the Church in the interest of world peace is the work of the foreign missionary whose task is by word and life to interpret the nations to each other: magnificent the work he has done and is doing to this end.

4. We can each of us pray for world-peace, and there is nothing which needs more constantly and more earnestly to be done by all men of good-will. For prayer, let us remember, is not a formula, it is a life. It is not merely petition, it is a covenant and a programme. One cannot offer the Lord's Prayer sincerely without becoming a daring adventurer in the world of good-will. Our most constant and persistent prayer may well be that of Elisha. As we think to-day of the young men and women who are to be the makers of the new world, as with ever-broadening horizon we think of the multitudes confused by false values, sheep without a shepherd, shall we not pray with the prophet, "Lord, open

the eyes of the young man that he may see, Lord, open the eyes of all the peoples of the world that they may see." Then in the records of eternity it may be written as of old, "And the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw. And behold the mountains were full of horses and chariots of fire round about"—the invisible but invincible resources that are ever theirs whose hands are in the hand of the living God. "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God."

"I to the hills will lift mine eyes
From whence doth come mine aid."

Chapter IX

A Court That Never Adjourns

> I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.
>
> —Acts 24:16.

That was great exercise, productive of a vigorous and satisfying life. Paul trained himself, that is the word, to keep his conscience in good order. He speaks constantly of this ideal, and of this effort, for apparently it was an effort, something a man has to cling to and fight for. "War a good warfare," he cries, "holding faith and a good conscience," and again "holding the mystery of the faith in a good conscience."

How much thought do we moderns give to keeping the conscience in working order? Are we quite sure that we have a conscience? If so, what is it, and what part does it play in our lives? Do we realise that the thing, above everything else, which is at stake in our lives and in the world-life to-day is the supremacy or the defeat of conscience?

Conscience is the little bit of divinity which survives in us. Just where within it resides,

what its physical basis if it have a physical basis, what for instance its relation, if it have a relation, to the structure of the brain or, as the Bible suggests, of the heart, the wisdom of the schools cannot tell. If a man's philosophy be materialistic, if it know only atoms and cells, bone and tissue and nerve, he is not likely to recognise a conscience if he should meet one. And so you may read not a few modern books on philosophy and psychology, and never discover that you have a conscience. But you cannot read this most marvellously modern of all books, the Bible: you cannot have the experiences of a normal and unspoiled human life, a life devoutly interested in and responsive to the greater phenomena of the universe, and doubt that you have a conscience.

Conscience is by far the greatest gift of the human spirit. It is greater than the mind: for it is the mind of God speaking to and through the mind of man: the small boy's definition was both beautiful and true, "Conscience is Jesus whispering in the heart." It is greater than memory, that marvellous power of the mind without which life would lack all continuity, without which it would be an unrelated succession of events, experiences, sensations, a job lot of odds and ends. Memory recalls, lives over again great experiences, hears again voices long silent, sees again

familiar faces; but conscience gives quality and character to memory, sorts out the things memory recalls, brings to one rebuke, remorse, to another approval and the joy of achievement. Conscience is greater than the imagination. Imagination, said Napoleon, rules the world; but not imagination divorced from conscience, as he and William II found out. Imagination conceives, with the brick and mortar of thought and fancy it constructs. But conscience sits in judgment upon the children of the imagination, brings to each an unerring and inflexible standard, says of this one Right, of another Wrong. Conscience is greater than the will. The will says, I will, I will not. But conscience dares to set up a higher authority. To my firm "I will" it rings out "You ought not"; to my "I will not," "You ought." Conscience—it is the supreme court of the universe set up in the human spirit. And it is always in session. Some sufferer has cried:

> "Why should not conscience have vacation
> As well as other courts o' th' nation,
> Have equal power to adjourn,
> Appoint appearance and return?"

Most of us have sympathised at some time with David Harum's longing for something which would "make the inward monitor quit jerkin' the reins."

The word is significant. It means literally

knowledge with—knowledge with oneself, or with some one else, or complete knowledge. Of course the idea that the word itself predicates God, that knowledge with means knowledge with God, is questioned like all good things in earth and heaven. But if on this point the derivation of the word is uncertain, the testimony of many a man's experience is clear. I have a secret. Not for worlds would I tell it. I hide it away in the shadowy recesses of my soul. No one knows. I am safe. But I am wrong. Some one else does know. And I soon find it out. Conscience tells me. "If I ascend into heaven"—in giddy flights of pride and self-confidence when I seem to sit securely on the throne of my universe, "Thou art there." "If I make my bed in hell"—if I say in some abyss of self-abandonment the inner voice will be silent, "Thou art there." "If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea"—if I say in some new place, at some new task, where no one knows me, I shall escape

> "The following Feet
> And a Voice above their beat,"

"Thou art there." "If I say, Surely the darkness will cover me; even the night shall be light about me."

So men have always found. Go back for a

moment to the Old Testament: here the word does not occur, but the reality constantly confronts us. Adam cannot do wrong and forget it. Conscience has pronounced sentence upon him. "I was afraid," he cries. Why? Because some other knew his secret, and he knew that other knew. "I hid myself." Why? The vain effort to escape from the torture of conscience. Cain finds his brother in the way and kills him. But the blood of Abel cries from the ground. Long afterward I seem to hear Cain cry with Lady Macbeth, "Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh." The sons of Jacob in the presence of the brother they so shamefully wronged, now ruler in Egypt, do not recognise him. But conscience will not be silent. "We are verily guilty," they say to one another, "concerning our brother in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us and we would not hear"—now after long years they hear those cries again, conscience sits in judgment on memory—"therefore is this distress come upon us."

But this is but one phase of the activities of conscience. Look with me at some others as they are suggested in significant phrases of St. Paul, who has more by far to say about the conscience than any other Bible writer.

Repeatedly he speaks of "a good conscience."

To the true man conscience is not foe, but friend, not the stern, relentless judge who pursues the erring soul with interminable punishment, but the strong, sure guide who with unerring instinct points the way or proclaims the truth. Among the deep satisfactions of Paul's life is what he calls "the testimony of conscience," his conscience bearing witness with him in the Holy Ghost, that by the grace of God, not in his own strength, he has behaved himself like a man. Or again the inner witness tells him that were it necessary he would be ready to sacrifice his eternal welfare for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh; and at the council of Jerusalem he cries, "Men and brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day." Just here, of course, he borders on what for a lesser man would be a danger line. One is a bit suspicious of a man who advertises his conscience overmuch —"The lady doth protest too much, methinks" —who calls it habitually into the perilous spheres of publicity, who is always saying, "I have the approval of conscience." "There is no human creature," says Bushnell, "so thoroughly wicked and diabolical as he that is protesting in the heat of his will, or the fume of his grudges and resentments, how conscientious he is." Such a man needs to have seen himself, as Paul did, as the chief of sinners, and to have cried with him, "O

wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" Then in hours when he has won victories in the strength of God he can rejoice in the testimony of a good conscience. But notice this, a good conscience may be what we commonly call a bad conscience: a "bad conscience" may be an evidence that our conscience is in good working order, attending persistently to business, rebuking sin, indolence, half-heartedness. A really bad conscience is a conscience which is no longer active, or accurate, which is silent when the very stones are crying out, which says, Well done, when it ought to say, Depart into the lowest abyss of hell.

Then Paul speaks of a weak conscience. He is thinking at the moment of the overscrupulous conscience, hypersensitive, lacking in virility and the confidence of an erect and valiant courage. Such was the conscience of Pascal who became morbidly afraid that his love for his sister was an unholy rival of his love for God, and wrote in his diary, "God forgive me for loving my dear sister so much," then he deleted the word "dear": or the conscience of that relative of my own, the possessor of a peculiarly aggravated case of the Scotch conscience, who surrendered the great opportunities for good which were his as a large and successful employer of labour in order to undertake specifically religious work, as he con-

ceived it, for which he had no qualification: and then later, realising his error, came to his former partner and asked to be taken into the business of which he had been the chief as a clerk. Such a weak conscience can be a real trial to its possessor, his family and friends.

Then, according to Paul, there is the wounded conscience, wounded, perhaps by others' thoughtlessness and indifference, or by constant contact with consciences of a coarser fibre, whose code of honour has been, Don't be too particular, it doesn't really matter. Or the wound has come from some bitter experience of human wrong that has sorely tested faith in God and man: now in the thick of the fight conscience is sick, it speaks, if at all, with confused and uncertain utterance: amid choices that are shaping destinies it limps and lags.

Then there is the defiled conscience. What a strange tragedy is this that by the persistent disobedience of man the conscience may be so perverted that the voice of God, reaching the soul through a thick crust of self-interest and self-indulgence, becomes so confused with the voice of self that there emerges that defilement of soul in which habitually good is seen as evil, and evil as good. I know no better instance than that characterisation of an early governor of New England by the historian Palfrey, "Dudley, like

many others, had tampered with his better mind till the distinctions which make the world's security were obscured to his own view, and with a certain sort of sincerity, he would call evil good and good evil, as often as evil would suit his domineering mind." "With a certain sort of sincerity," that is the peril to oneself and to others of the defiled conscience. It is the peril which Paul describes in another searching characterisation, "men that speak lies branded in their own conscience with a hot iron." Here is the suggestion that lies may be so imprinted and imbedded in a man's conscience, may so become part of its structure and essence, that to their fiction and infamy he is callous, insensitive, as flesh may be rendered insensitive—past feeling —by the branding of a hot iron. Is this what happened, I wonder, to the German conscience with such tragic result to the world? Judging Germany, do not forget what may happen, what may have happened, to yours.

And now another mighty phrase from this inexhaustible mine, the letters of Paul. Listen. "For conscience' sake." What a glorious history of fearless words and heroic deeds these words recall. What glimpses they open to view of the real dignity and glory of the human spirit, of the liberty that can scoff at bolts and bars, of the victories that in darkest days never know

defeat. For conscience' sake, I hear Joseph crying in his hour of temptation, What do I want at the moment, How will this affect my future—no—"How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God." I hear again those three brave Hebrews of Daniel's time, "Our God Whom we serve is able to deliver us from the fiery furnace: but if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." Or Luther at Worms, "Here I stand, God help me, I cannot do otherwise." Or Latimer, lighting the candle that will never go out, crying to his fellow-martyr, "Be of good cheer, Master Ridley." "For conscience' sake"—the words recall to us, too, a long succession of brave though obscure men whose names do not live in history, but who again and again in hours of stress have chosen the right at any cost, counting the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of the world.

Men and women, is this greatness of soul to perish from the earth, this priceless heritage of the soul's supremacy in God? Against it during the war stood in battle array another philosophy of life, that the state is the conscience of the individual. Does it ask the individual to do shameful wrong, let not the individual trouble, the will of the state is supreme, what the state commands is right. Thank God, this assault upon conscience

through years of untold suffering was overthrown. But it was overthrown at dreadful cost not only in blood, in treasure, but at dreadful cost, too, in the sensitive realm of personality. In the strange reactions from the exaltations of sacrificial service the consciences of great numbers of men and women have been wounded, weakened, defiled. Strained for years to the breaking point, many have sought refuge in indulgences which inevitably silence the voice of God. Many more have not somehow brought from the conflict confidence in the Conscience of the universe, they may sing

> For right is right, since God is God,
> And right the day will win;

but their ultimate faith is still in weapons, in a designing diplomacy, in a narrowly nationalistic policy of revenge and exploitation. At the root of all the thinking of multitudes is a practical philosophy increasingly materialistic. The Voice of God is not disobeyed, it is dismissed. Conscience is simply a venerable name for one's better self, for scruples unpleasant to live with, for consideration for others which often limits freedom of action. And all too often the question is being asked, whether our splendid boys who laid down their lives for the preservation of liberty of conscience and freedom of soul have not laid them down in vain.

To-day as ever the hope of the world is with the individual in whom conscience is supreme. Such men were the creators of all the glory of the world before the war: they will shape the world that is to rise upon its wreckage. It was said of a great Scotch preacher that he was a conscience to the city in which he lived. That is the one way out. We must each of us be a conscience to our homes, to our business, to the community in which we live. How can we hope to do it? The New Testament points the way. First, we need the cleansed conscience, cleansed of all its defilements and perversions; "the blood of Christ," says the writer to the Hebrews in a great gospel note, "shall cleanse your conscience from dead works"—that is, from everything tainted by the spirit of self, which is the spirit of death—"to serve the living God"—note the redeeming contrast. Then we need to have the conscience educated and this is done by constant contact with the conscience of Christ. And then it needs to be constantly exercised by sensitive obedience in the way made so clear by St. Paul. So will its guidance be ever more clear in time and eternity.

God sets a still small Voice,
Deep every soul within;
It guideth to the right,
And warneth us of sin;

If we that Voice obey,
Clearer its tones will be;
Till all God's will for us
Clear as noonday we see.
If we that Voice neglect,
Fainter will be its tone;
If still unheeded, it
Will leave us quite alone;
O grief to be allowed,
To go your own wild way,
Lord, hold Thy children back,
Lest we so sadly stray.

We thank Thee, our Father, for the Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world, and that in all our hearts Thou hast not left Thyself without witness. Shine brightly, we pray Thee, that we may always see the way, and when we see it make us willing and eager to follow.

"Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom."

Chapter X

Balaam—A Study of the Intricacies of Conscience

> Balaam, the son of Beor, loved the hire of wrong-doing.
>
> —2 Peter 2:15.

The story of Balaam made a deep impress upon the Hebrew mind. Bible writers for generations afterwards drew from it lessons for their time. It is a story which has many perplexities for the literal and mechanical mind. But when the records are interpreted in the light of the intellectual atmosphere and the literary devices of the age that gave them birth, the difficulties cease to perplex, the story grips us as it gripped the men of old, and Balaam, the son of Beor, is seen to be an exceedingly modern person. Indeed the persistence of Balaam in religious thought is due to the fact that he is so very human, so much like ourselves, a composite personality, a bundle of contradictions, a good deal of good in him, and quite a little that is utterly bad.

We owe to the poetic and prophetic mind of Balaam some of the greatest words of insight and inspiration that ever have fallen from human

lips. The first words flashed by Samuel Morse over the experimental telegraph line from Washington to Baltimore in 1844 were taken from Balaam—"What hath God wrought!" Balaam was looking out on the armies of Israel, recalling the bitter oppression, the seemingly endless journeys, the dreadful privations of long ago, and now their marvellous deliverances and victories, and he cried, "What hath God wrought!" It was a great word, the word of one who saw the mind of God at work in the mind of man. It was under similar conditions that he uttered his familiar prayer, "Let me die the death of the righteous, let my last end be like his"—the prayer manifestly of a man who recognises the ultimate issues and the supreme values of a human life. Where in all literature is there a better utterance of the unpurchasable soul than this—"If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God to do less or more, to do either good or bad of mine own mind;" or of the obedient spirit than this: "Must I not take heed to speak that which the Lord hath put in my mouth?" What better appreciation of the character of God, of the fact that He will not play us false, of His unchanging faithfulness than this: "God is not a man that he should lie; neither the Son of man that He should repent; hath He said, and shall

He not do it, or hath He spoken and shall He not make it good?" And where is there a more beautiful statement of the confident hope of a great coming deliverer that throbbed and pulsed in the spirits of the early prophets than this: "I shall see Him but not now, I shall behold Him, but not nigh": "there shall come forth a Star out of Jacob and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel." Manifestly Balaam was a deeply religious man to whom God was very near and very real, a prayerful man accustomed to seek constantly the guidance of his God, quite convinced (had you asked him) of the wisdom and the invincibility of God, and genuinely disposed to take His way, especially when it agreed with his own. Moreover, on his lips we find the great words that will often be on the lips of every man who knows God and knows himself, the first true utterance of the awakened human spirit; "I have sinned—" deliberately separated myself from God, taken my own way.

But, alas for it, a man's words may be far from an accurate register of his heart and life. Even his thoughts may be deceptive. We may have beautiful thoughts and clothe them in exquisite diction, and yet the word in us may never become flesh. Thought may be a dreamland, not a dynamic of the soul; fine sentences may be the narcotic of a slumbering conscience. I remember a

modern Balaam to whom I owe very much coming to my study on a Monday morning and telling me of some thoughts he had recently been having upon some of the Psalms. And they were fertile, beautiful thoughts. Then a mental switch of some kind seemed to operate and he proceeded to outline to me an attractive scheme for making money on Sundays, quite unconscious that it was a contradiction of all for which in earlier life he had stood, and was already bringing upon him the criticism and distrust of many who had expected of him better things. In the contradictions of the human spirit you and I may be genuinely moved by the worship and the Word of God, by the prayers and the Psalms of the ages, and the link with life may never be firmly forged.

It was so, alas, with Balaam. His frailty became manifest in a time of war. Balak, King of Moab, was greatly troubled by the numbers and the victories of Israel. "These people," he said in a significant phrase, "will lick me up." He was wise enough to recognise that Israel's victories were not due wholly to big battalions and brilliant generals, but to their God; and shrewd enough to see that if in some way the favour of this God could be transferred from Israel to Moab, the war would be as good as won. So he sent emissaries to Balaam, whom he recognised as the human representative of Israel's God, freighted

with the only arguments which even to-day diplomats know much about—bribes, no, that is an undiplomatic word—rewards, gifts in their hands, a little consideration here, a strip of territory there—appealing to Balaam to go and curse the Israelites, quite sure that this would do the business. For there was an ancient custom of devoting one's enemies to destruction before entrance on war with them; the Romans had public officers especially assigned to this function. If a good cursing from the saints of God would have settled the issues of the great war, surely the day of genuine peace would have come long ago.

And now begins in Balaam the struggle so dramatically pictured in the narrative between religious conviction and self-interest, the age-long effort of the human spirit to get on both sides of the big issues of life, to stand for high ideals and commercial success, for the sacred principles of humanity and the exigencies of political expediency. And how clearly are made manifest in the narrative the many devices of self-deceit, the coddlings of conscience by which a man will try to convince himself he is right when he knows perfectly well that he is wrong; the excuses he will offer to himself, the prayers he will make to God to show him his duty when he knows it already. Balaam invites the diplomats from Moab to stay over night; that, he would say to himself, is sim-

ply decent hospitality. In the meantime he will ask God's guidance and see if he cannot find the way he desires to do God's will and get these promised gifts. To me it is intensely significant that according to the narrative, in the quiet of the night it is God who begins the conversation with Balaam, "What men are these with thee?" In such conditions God usually begins the conversation. Conscience awakens, and speaks in no uncertain tones. "Thou shalt not go with them, Balaam, thou shalt not curse the people." And Balaam with a sad and self-righteous heart sends the diplomats about their business.

Ere the curtain rises on the next act of the drama, knowing something of the human heart in its intricacies and duplicities, because I know my own, I am sure that Balaam had quite a little conversation with himself. He would tell himself over and over again that he really wanted that money to do good with, that it would surely be a good piece of work to get that much money away from the heathen and put it to the service of the Lord; that the cursing requested would, of course, not do Israel any harm; and that a more persistent presentation of his case might have won the divine consent. Soon his opportunity came—it will always come to the man who gets into that frame of mind. Balak was

not a man to take one refusal. To him the refusal meant just one thing, that the emissaries were not important enough—he had sent a boy to do a man's work—and that the price offered was not enough. So he sent princes more and more honourable than the first, and told Balaam to name his own price. "Let nothing, I pray, hinder thee from coming unto me. I will promote thee to very great honour, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me." Again Balaam took a night to think it over. I can almost hear him asking himself if the mere fact of these men coming again was not a providential circumstance—you and I look for providences in queer places sometimes. "Thus," says Rebecca, the Jewess, in Ivanhoe, "do men throw on fate the issue of their own wild passions." By morning he had convinced himself that he had the divine consent to go, so long as he would say only what he was bidden. You can convince yourself that white is black and that black is white if you will only ponder the proposition long enough in the dark room of a selfish spirit. But what do we read? "God's anger was kindled because he went." There is a time, a perilous time, in the experience of the tempted and yielding spirit, when God will permit us to go on our own wild way because He sees we are bent upon it, sees that in no school

but the school of bitter experience can we learn our lesson. But He will not leave us alone.

"Oh, Love that wilt not let me go."

This, it seems to me, is the great fact in human experience so graphically pictured in the story of Balaam's ass. As Balaam goes on the journey of self-interest the angel of the Lord stands in the way with drawn sword. What a picture it is for an inspired artist! Here are depicted the obstacles God places in the way of the wandering spirit, the appeals that in the secret places of the soul will not be silenced, the strange experiences that are as a sentry's challenge calling, "Halt." It is significant that at first Balaam does not see the apparition, but his ass sees it, and turns out of the way. The Bible makes clear that man has much to learn of God, of His care, of His love, from the so-called lower animals; "The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." "Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise." Tell me, in all literature, is there a better representation of a man resisting the will of God, flogging himself into faith in his own arrant stupidity, ascribing to second causes events which reach back to his own evil heart, than the prophet beating the

poor ass, because he sees more than he does—it is a spectacle to make angels smile and penitents weep. But at last his eyes are opened and then he is ready to go home. "If it displease Thee, I will get me back again." But the answer is in the negative. "No, Balaam, go on, see the thing through, say only what I tell you." What is the point? Why, that there are choices in life that are irrevocable, false steps that never can be retraced. You cannot tamper with your soul, play fast and loose with moral distinctions, confuse prayer with the effort to find somewhere an opening in the beautiful land of selfish desire, identify religion with noble thoughts and fine-spun sentences and rich ritual and heavenly hopes—this and nothing else—and ever be the same man that you were. Soon Balaam goes back to his home, a sadder but a wiser man. He has learned, for a time, at least, his lesson. He has seen the arresting hand of God. But havoc has been done with his character; whatever the rest of the story of his life may have been, he goes down, branded in the records of his race, as a prophet of God who loved the wages of unrighteousness.

Shall not our last glimpse be, not of Balaam nor of the ass, but of the angel in the way, calling "Halt" to some of us in our selfish, sordid and God-forgetful course, reminding us that if a man is to die the death of the righteous, he must live

the life of the righteous, pointing to One who is able to succour them who are tempted, able to keep us from falling, able to save to the uttermost, and who brings to us again to-day His great word, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things"—all those things that dignify and ennoble life and that shall survive the shock of death—"shall be added unto you."

Chapter XI

God's Human Temples

Glorify God in your body.
—1 Corinthians 6:20.

The words which follow, "and in your spirit, which are God's," are not found in the older manuscripts, and are rightly omitted in the revised version. Paul has a very definite matter in view; he is appealing to his Corinthian friends to recognise the sacredness of the human body. In Corinth there were large numbers of people who in a particularly pernicious and offensive way debased and desecrated the body. And they had an argument in support of their position. The body, they said, is not the man; and so the sins of the body cannot be reckoned as sins of the man—a convenient argument for the glutton, the drunkard, and the libertine. Paul had a very different view. Don't you know, he said, that your bodies are members of Christ, temples of the Holy Ghost? If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy. And as he anticipates the mysterious change which confronts us all, he does not think of the body as a tenement out of which we

will then move, or a worn-out garment of which we will then be well rid; the Lord Jesus, he declares, shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of His glory. It was this view, intimately related to ancient controversies, of the permanence in some form of the human body, and its sacredness as once at least in history the dwelling-place of God, that gave us that clause of the Apostles' Creed in which many people find difficulty to-day, "I believe in the resurrection of the body." Paul believed it with all his soul. Therefore glorify God, he said, in your body.

Now there are still many people who incline to cheapen and debase the body. Many, alas, do it in the Corinthian way. A man, they tell us, may surely have his fling. He will only be young once. It is just a phase; don't worry, he will come out all right. Besides, why are a man's physical appetites given him if he is not to indulge them? (Unless it be that he is to master them.) I knew a man of some prominence in the financial world who talked in this way. Being in Paris with his young son, he took him out at night to see life by seeing the wreckage of life; the boy would probably go anyhow, the father argued; why not with him? Most of the night the old roué and the as yet innocent boy had what they called a good time. A few years passed and the

young man died in his twenties, decadent, his physicians said, in every organ, worn out by his sins; and not long afterward the father died of a broken heart, for he had planned everything for his son. Men who take the cynical view of this matter forget that great word of Scripture which is also a great word of experience, constantly confirmed in the lives of men and women to-day, "God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." "I beseech you, by the mercies of God present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

Other people in our time depreciate the body by denying its existence. "All is mind; you only think you have a pain." The illusion has worked very successfully with many in transferring their dominant emphasis to healthier zones of thought and feeling than they have been wont to live in. And I wonder if most of us do not depreciate the body in our thought of the future life. That thing on which we looked the other day with a shudder, and with promises of better things, was not, we instinctively felt, our friend; he was gone. Something in us echoed to the solemn dirge, "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust." Of this more in a moment. Suffice it now to say that neither science nor revelation knows anything of a spirit functioning without a body.

"Eternal form shall still divide
The eternal soul from all beside."

My thought in this sermon is not to impose upon you any conception of St. Paul, still less any theory of my own, as to the ultimate function of the body in the destinies of the human spirit. I know very well that the convictions that count, the faith that grips a man when he needs it most, —these are seldom imposed from without. They grow up out of life's experience; they find us more often than we find them. And at the beginning they are often tried out by way of experiment. This is so, of course, in mechanical invention, or in medical research. The man doing research work tries this and that, goes on a hundred fruitless trails. Then one day there is a new experiment, some new combination of familiar forces, some new application of principles already known, and the thing men have been vainly seeking for years is found. There is something like this in the making of a man's faith. Faith has been well defined as a venture and a devotion. "I am not sure of this," we say, "but I will put it to the test." Seeking and trying, we find. My thought is to suggest to you one or two reasons why as a working-basis for a satisfying and victorious life we should respond to Paul's challenge, "Glorify God in your body."

For one thing, what a great thought of God is

that which Paul here gives us to live with, to put to the test. He is not absent in distant spaces, nor active occasionally or spasmodically. He has not started off the process in distant æons, and left it to work itself out, interfering now and then in mercy or in wrath when things are badly tangled. No, He is a Spirit to whom each human spirit is present and precious, so precious that He longs to express His boundless and inexhaustible life through my life—even these hands, these limbs, this face, parts of a temple of the living God. Very improbable, you say. So a few years ago were the submarine, the wireless telephone, and radium and a hundred other modern miracles. The trouble with many of us is that we are so thing-gripped, chained and bound by the material. We have forgotten that we are living in a spiritual universe. We are not ready for the surprises with which God is always amazing His children. And He will not force His way into the temple of any man's soul; He esteems too highly our personality, His great gift to us. But to every one of us He is saying, "Behold I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in unto him."

And then this thought of St. Paul's is very suggestive as to the method of man's approach to God, how we are to get God—I speak in all reverence—out of the haze and fog of life, and be

quite sure of Him as our great Guest and unfailing Helper. Many familiar methods are suggested. We must pray without ceasing, study God's word, attend church regularly, find some place of earnest service, observe Sunday carefully. ("The devil," says Canon Simpson of St. Paul's, "likes to keep us talking about what we ought not to do on Sunday morning, because none knows better than he that our destinies are really determined by what we do on Saturday night.") All these are important, essential indeed for a vital and vigorous Christian life. But Paul begins here at another point. Guard well, he says, the physical expressions of your religious life. Begin with the simple things. Glorify God in your body. The whole of life, not some part of it may be a sacrament of the Eternal. How like he was here to his great Master who took the two simplest elements in the life of His time—bread and wine—and made them enduring symbols of the ultimate necessities of the soul.

Let me suggest one or two ways in which we may glorify God with the body.

We may do so, surely, by keeping the body strong and pure, a fit dwelling-place for our great Guest. Athletics, kept in their important place, may be a helpful approach to communion with God. The cold bath may be a baptismal cleansing. Recreation, to the man who is bringing the

whole of life to God, is re-creation. Our Christian Science friends overemphasise a great truth when they declare that sickness is a blunder. Often it is the disastrous fruit of a long series of blunders on our part, on the part of those who have gone before us, on the part of the community in which we live. "There is something impious," said Charles Kingsley, "in the neglect of personal health, of strength and beauty; it is often a form of laziness." We glorify God, in Paul's great phrase, by keeping under the body, keeping a tight rein upon its appetites, declining to be ruled by its sensations, denying it every weakening indulgence, conserving its energies, reacting quickly from its reactions, teaching it in all things that we rule, not it. Remember the first sentence in Huxley's classic definition of the educated man, "That man has had a liberal education who has been so trained in his youth that his body is the ready servant of his will, and does with ease and pleasure all the work that as a mechanism it is capable of." Lord Morley speaks of Mr. Gladstone as possessing "incomparable physical gifts which seemed to encase the soul of fire in a frame of pliant steel." Such a man glorifies God in his body.

Has it ever occurred to you that we may glorify God through that wonderful mirror and window of the soul—the human face? Some one objected

once to Edwin M. Stanton's criticism of the meanness in a certain man's face as being something for which the man was not responsible. Lincoln's gruff Secretary of War burst out at once, "Every man over fifty is responsible for his face." Long before we are fifty every one of us will have glorified either God or the devil by his face. A visitor to the National Portrait Gallery in London noted that the characteristic portrait of the 16th century differed from that of the 17th, and both from that of the 18th, and the difference, he said, corresponded remarkably with the difference between the characteristic literature of these several centuries. And he goes on to ask, "Am I wrong in saying that the characteristic countenance of the 20th century is deeply seamed with lines of regret, of disillusionment, of cynicism, of nervous apprehension?" The author of that arresting little book, "Whither?" says, "We see few satisfied faces, such as we can remember long ago, full of inner content—faces on which the dove of peace sat brooding." Some one spoke once to Scott of the grace and beauty of Byron's portrait. "Yes," said Sir Walter, "the countenance of Byron is full of lustre, but the lustre has never been lighted." He had not glorified God with his body. I have seen a face that was meant to be a masterpiece of the great Artist's hand becoming cold and coarse as years in the hard school of per-

petual prosperity passed by. And I have seen a face that had been that of a drunken derelict shining like a cathedral window in the glory of the sunshine because of the indwelling Christ who had given him the victory. And I have seen a woman living for years a shallow, flippant life, whom God had taken in hand, beneath the burden of a transfigured sorrow becoming beautiful even in old age with the very beauty of God. Henry James tells us of Roderick Hudson, a brilliant, unprincipled, conceited young American artist who had been living a self-indulgent life in Rome when his mother and her adopted daughter, Mary Garland, who had been very anxious about him, came to visit him. Right in the middle of a sentence Roderick breaks off and says to his mother, "What makes you look so odd? What has happened to your face these two years? It has changed its expression." "Your mother has prayed a great deal," said Mary, simply. Surely she had glorified God with her body.

Now I cannot think that in thus chiselling the face, and moulding the body for God's glory, we are building only for the few years of this earthly life. I do not forget that the physical particles of which our bodies are composed change every few years, that we have a different body to-day from that say of ten years ago. But amid all the changes there is something permanent; it is your

body; men would know it anywhere. Besides, nowhere does Scripture suggest that these bodies just as they are shall rise again. Some of us would at once say with Henry Drummond, "Surely we can trust the Lord to do better for us than that!" We shall be *changed*, says Paul in the greatest word of all the ages (save the words of our Lord) on the subject. "There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." It is significant that in our time men of careful scientific training, whose minds run in the modern mould, are coming back, some of them, at least, as a cherished hypothesis to a conception very like that of St. Paul. They suggest to us that there may be slowly building a brain within the brain, a body within the body—the product through the years of thought and feeling, the issue of our persistent choices, the permanent structure of conduct and character, the ultimate dwelling-place and implement of the soul. It is at least a great conception on which to build a reverent and earnest life.

Here is this sermon in three lines of Browning:

> "To man propose this test;
> Thy body at its best,
> How far can that project thy soul on its lone way?"

A long, long way, I am sure, if we seek all the way upon the journey the help of our Lord Jesus Christ who, living His human life in the open

air beneath the Syrian skies, sleeping soundly in the boat amid the raging storm, winning the devotion of rugged fishermen, must have been no anemic ascetic, but a man every inch, who knew what was in man, who was tempted in all points like as we are yet without sin, who learned obedience by the things which He suffered, and who at the last found the implement of His perfect sacrifice for us men and our sins in His bleeding body! Ye are not your own. Ye were bought with a price. Glorify God therefore in your body.

Lord, let my body be a servant of my spirit; and both body and spirit servants of Jesus Christ; that doing all things for Thy glory here, I may be partaker of Thy glory hereafter, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Chapter XII

The Great Book of the Ages

I rejoice at Thy Word as one that findeth great spoil.

—Psalms 119:162.

One thought, expressed with infinite variety, runs through this longest of the Psalms—the greatness of God's law, its unfailing wisdom, its rich and satisfying response to every human need. In each of the one hundred and seventy-six verses, save two, as every Bible student knows, the word "law" or one of its synonyms occurs. God's law has proved a sure guide for the Psalmist in the shaping of his own life: "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." He is so grateful for it, so confident in it, that he is eager to tell of it to others: "I will speak of Thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed"—there is no one to whom he is afraid to speak on such a theme. But in no other verse is his devotion better expressed than in our text, "I rejoice at Thy Word as one that findeth great spoil."

There are not a few evidences that the Psalm was written by one who knew the soldier's life. As a soldier, his thought was not only of the cause

he would serve, or the foe he would down, but of the spoil he would win, spoil perhaps like that which the mother of Sisera so eagerly describes. Sisera is already the victim of Jael's treachery, but his mother does not know it. Motherlike, she watches for him at the window. "Why," she asks, "is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariot?" And then a comforting thought occurs to her, "Have they not found, have they not divided the spoil, to Sisera a spoil of divers colours, of divers colours of embroidery on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil?" "I rejoice," cries the Psalmist, "at Thy Word as one that findeth great spoil."

Do we feel in this way about the Bible? The spoil is immeasurably enriched since the Psalmist's time. Is it true, I wonder, that the Bible is the most widely circulated book in the world, and of widely circulated books the least read? Why is it?

Lack of time is one reason often given. The strain of life in these days is intense. The weeks have wings; the hours are not half long enough. Yet it is a familiar fact that the men who complain least of lack of time are the men who are doing most; they have learned how to make time, and how to use time. Mr. Gladstone, when Prime Minister, the destinies of empires hanging in the balance, found time to give his son a half-hour

lesson in Latin every day. "Want of time," said Martineau, "is want of moral energy." And is it not, after all, a matter of proportion? We find time for the things we deem most essential and immediate—too little perhaps, but some time, for the nourishment and exercise of the body, for the morning and evening newspaper, for recreation, for keeping our friendships in repair. What of the nourishment of the soul? What of the things that are ultimate and eternal, when the passing show is over, when the game of grab is played? Is it any wonder that these higher interests of the spirit become distant and unreal when we think of them so little? A chapter each day—five minutes in the morning, five minutes at night, which of us could not find time for that? A single verse committed to memory as one dresses in the morning, summoned thoughtfully to one's aid in hours of stress and perplexity, would often change the whole atmosphere of life, and point the way of duty and the way of peace. John Wesley for the last forty years of his life rose every morning at four and devoted from one to two hours to devotional study and prayer. Samuel Rutherford rose at three, and spent the whole of the earlier hours in prayer and Bible study. That would be a strenuous programme for most of us to-day. But the point is this, if we think the thing important enough, we will find time for it.

A second difficulty. "The Bible doesn't interest me." But is that a reflection on the Bible or on you? Dickens and Thackeray, Tennyson and Longfellow, are not immediately interesting to the mind adjusted only to the newspaper, the magazine and the movies. In such an attitude of mind, it is well to recall what some of the great leaders in thought and human service have said of the Bible. John Ruskin's mother required him, by steady, daily toil, to learn long chapters of the Bible by heart. Of this he said, "I count it to have been the most precious and, on the whole, the one essential part of my whole education." Carlyle declared the Bible to be "the one Book wherein, for thousands of years, the spirit of man has found light and nourishment, and an interpreting response to whatever is deepest in him." Huxley declared the English Bible to be "the national epic of Great Britain;" he said, "Consider that for three centuries this book has been woven into all that is noblest and best in English history; consider that it is written in the noblest and purest English, and that it abounds in exquisite beauties of literary form." Coleridge declared the Bible to be "beyond compare, the most perfect instrument, the only adequate organ, of the best mind and the best heart of mankind." Lincoln, whose marvellous style is traceable more than anything else to his study of the Bible, said: "I

am profitably engaged in reading the Bible. Take all of this Book upon reason that you can, and the balance on faith, and you will live and die a better man." "There is no book in the world like it," writes Hall Caine; "the finest novels ever written fall short in interest of any one of the stories it tells. Whatever strong situations I have in my books are not of my creation, but are taken from the Bible. 'The Deemster' is the story of the prodigal son. 'The Bondman' is the story of Esau and Jacob. 'The Scapegoat' is the story of Eli and his sons, but with Samuel as a little girl; and 'The Manxman' is the story of David and Uriah." The latest novel by the same author is a searching sermon on the text, "Be sure your sin will find you out." And this is the book which in many nominally Christian homes lies unopened, and of which our children grow up ignorant!

"But," says another, "the Bible is such a difficult book. I have tried to read it faithfully, but really there are so many things I do not understand." It is true. The Bible is a difficult book. There are things in it which no man can understand, and it is well frankly to recognise the fact. Its themes are so vast and so spiritual, its horizon sometimes so distant. Surely the most foolish person in the world is he who thinks he can crowd the last word of truth about this universe into the dimensions of his mind. But, then, everything

worth while is difficult. The easy way is seldom the way that wins. The precious stones and minerals are not found on the surface; they are found by him who digs long and deep. The spoil is found only when the army has forced its way against tremendous odds and with dreadful loss into the enemy's country. It is so with the Bible; it unfolds new treasures every day to the man who brings to it patient, prayerful study, and who is building upon its teaching an earnest life.

But remember also the great simplicities of the Book. In it are whole chapters with hardly a word over one syllable, teachings which reach the simplest mind, stories by the score which fascinate a child as do no others. What other great book would you cease to read because there were passages here and there which you could not understand? Feed your soul upon the simplicities; put to work the things you do understand; believe with John Robinson that for you "God hath yet more light to break forth out of His Holy Word;" and you will find that the experience of Thomas Fuller, one of the wise men of the seventeenth century, is often yours: "Lord, this morning I read a chapter in the Bible, and therein observed a memorable passage whereof I never took notice before. Why now, and no sooner, did I see it? Formerly my eyes were as open, and the letters as legible. Is there not a thin veil laid over Thy

Word, which is more rarified by reading, and at last wholly worn away? I see the oil of Thy Word will never leave increasing whilst any bring an empty barrel."

Here is one more excuse. "There are so many conflicting views about the Bible; I don't know what to believe. In the old days we were taught that the Bible was every word of it written by the Spirit of God for the guidance of men; then we were ready to read and believe. But to-day, who knows? There are degrees of inspiration, we are told, parts of unequal value, composite documents, books written by one bearing another's name, a host of conflicting interpretations—what shall the average man believe? To him many a day the modern view seems to be that you take what you like of the Bible, and let the rest go." Here is a real difficulty. There is no doubt that the faith of many people in the authoritative teaching of the Bible has been weakened by certain related activities of our time. Specialists in Biblical criticism have gone to extremes from which, in not a few instances, they are already reacting. More commonly, men with a smattering of scholarship, with destructive emphasis, have brought the processes of the theological laboratory into the pulpit, and even more harmfully into the distortions, abridgments, and glaring headlines of the newspaper. And narrow and

timid souls, conceiving the ark of the Lord imperilled, have sought to repeat the always futile effort of the centuries, to array the Church of Christ and the truth as it is in Him against the resources of humble and earnest scholarship and the discoveries of science. But why should we cease to read the Bible because men differ as to its interpretation? I have not heard of a single lover of Shakespeare committing that master analyst of the human spirit to the shelf because there are those who tell us that his plays were written not by one Shakespeare, but by one Bacon. I have not heard of a single American declining to read the biography of George Washington, doubting the reality of his existence, the purity of his character, or the greatness of his service, because higher critics of the literary firmament tell us the hatchet story was an invention of the unscrupulous Weems. Moreover, the things that trouble us are nothing new; through the centuries interpretations have been legion. Calvin called the Bible writers "sure and authentic amanuenses of the Holy Spirit;" but he omitted the Book of Revelation from his exposition. Luther called the Epistle of James "an epistle of straw."

Come, then, to the Book itself, not to what men say about it. Open your mind to its teachings; steep your soul in its spirit. Remember that it has one great theme—God and the human soul,

their relations in time and eternity, God and man alienated by sin, reconciled in Jesus Christ. Every part of the Bible—history, legislation, poetry, parable, preaching, letters—illustrates, throws some light upon, this central theme. Recognise frankly the progressive teaching of the Book, from the crude thought and life of primitive ages, to the perfect life and light in the fulness of time in Jesus Christ. Read the Bible as a message of the Heavenly Father to your soul; read it with this prayer in your heart, that it may become to you ever more perfectly the channel of present revelation, the servant who brings you into the presence of the living Master. Come to it, if you will, as a scholar with keen, analytic mind, testing it as you would test any other book by historical method; so doing you will be quite likely to recognise in it the human element everywhere manifest, to see that its inspiration was not primarily of words, but of eager and obedient human spirits, of events, of great individual and national experiences—the unfolding of God, of His will and His ways, ever more clearly in the lives of men and nations; so doing, you will say many a day, with the Psalmist, "I rejoice at Thy Word as one that findeth great spoil." But first of all, whether you be a scholar or unlearned, come to the Book as a sinner in need of a Saviour, as a weak, blind, struggling soul crying out for God; and, as the

days pass, you will surely join with that great scholar, Robertson Smith, in saying: "This Book I know to be true by the witness of His Spirit in my heart, whereby I am assured that no other than God Himself is able to speak such words to my soul."

Chapter XIII

The Unanswered Prayers of Jesus

> (Jesus) fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.
>
> —Matthew 26:39.

Some one spoke the other day of the unanswered prayers of Jesus. Just for a moment the phrase rather startles one. And yet that there should have been in our Lord's experience such a thing as unanswered prayer is, after all, no more surprising than that He should pray at all. But that He did pray, that He lived the prayer life, more than that, that He still prays, that "He ever liveth to make intercession for us,"—are not these among the most comforting and vital convictions of our faith?

Our Lord's prayers were in striking contrast with the prayers of the Pharisees, who were the formalists and phrase-makers of His time. They prayed, we are told, to be seen of men. The eye of which they were most conscious as they prayed was the eye of the onlooker; the impression for which they cared most was the impression of formal piety which was made on him. In prayer

Jesus sought to be alone. He went out, we are repeatedly told, into a desert place and there prayed; or, He left His disciples and went into a mountain and prayed. Apparently He had the great gift of detaching Himself in a moment from His environment and entering into the secret place with His Father. Here is a significant word preserved for us by Saint Luke, "It came to pass, as Jesus was alone praying, His disciples were with Him." They stood around, for the moment furniture in the room, objects on the horizon, but our Lord was alone with His Father. It is a wonderful power we all possess that in any place, at any time, with any need, we can transport ourselves into the presence of God and receive His comfort, His guidance, and His power —as Nehemiah did that day, when face to face with a great problem and a great opportunity, serving at the king's table, the king asked him a question big with destiny for himself and his people, and before he tells his answer he makes this record, "So I prayed to the God of heaven." Parenthetic prayer—just a look and a longing, prayer and then power.

Then I notice that Jesus was never too busy to pray. When the times were particularly strenuous we read of His rising up a great while before day that He might go to His favourite place of prayer. One of the great religious leaders of

our country told me in one of those moments of self-revelation which friend may occasionally make to friend, that in travelling all over the country in the service of our soldiers during the war he had found more time to pray and to read his Bible than ever before, "Because," he said, "I needed it more. I could not get along without it."

Prayer was not simply the quiet hour of communion with His Father, in the experience of our Lord; it was the battlefield of His life. I read of Him that "He . . . offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears." At such times He prayed sometimes for individuals, as you and I so long to do. To Simon Peter He said, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not," a prayer which many a man likes to think of as offered for him in faith-testing times like these.

Apparently Jesus was moved to prayer very often in the presence of children. The most beautiful incident in the biography of Principal John Cairns whom I remember so well, a venerable figure in the Scotch pulpit in my boyhood days, is that on one occasion he was to preach in a country parish and arrived at the manse on Saturday afternoon. The minister's wife withdrew to get a cup of tea for the old man, leaving her little boy with him. By and by she heard a strange un-

accustomed sound, as it seemed to her, under such conditions, and as she listened and looked she saw that the old man was kneeling with the boy. It had seemed to him the most natural thing in the world to speak to his Great Friend about his little friend. Now listen: They "brought unto Him little children, that He should put His hands on them, and pray."

There was something in the very look of our Lord as He prayed which men could never forget. Of a certain incident Saint John says that it occurred "nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks." Why that last clause? Why not "nigh unto the place where they did eat bread"? Because the eating of bread was not the thing John remembered; it was the Lord giving thanks.

Students of the Bible have discussed at length, some of them, whether or not our Lord ever prayed with His disciples. Some say that He did not; that confession is an essential part of prayer, and that our Lord could not make confession of sin with His disciples. It may be so, though I am inclined to think that men are led to this conclusion by the limitations of the logical mind rather than by the vivid contacts of life. A mother knows nothing of her son's impurity, but as she pours out her heart to God for him there is no barrier between her and him in that moment; her

cry for forgiveness is like that of Moses when he said, "If not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book." I cannot think that there was anything held back in the perfect identification which our Lord made of himself with us men, of His sinlessness with our sin. And it would seem to me that there would be something very lacking in the beautiful relation which He maintained with these men if we could not think of them as often gathered together before the throne, led by the Master they loved and were giving themselves to serve. We read that in the upper room He gave thanks. It was surely their thanksgiving as well as His that was then voiced.

I notice that there are things for which our Lord would not pray. In the darkest hour of His life, He said, "Thinkest thou that I cannot beseech my Father, and He shall even now send me more than twelve legions of angels?" But the prayer for legions of angels to thwart the powers of ill He never made. I have a good friend, a Presbyterian elder, who when I met him during the war always asked me the same question, "Why does not God stop the war?" People who expect and pray for some catastrophic interference with the orderly processes, slow but sure, through which God works His holy will, have little encouragement in the prayers of Jesus.

It is very clear that our Lord counselled His

disciples to pray, and to believe in sure and certain answer to prayer when their prayers were in harmony with the will of God. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find." The descent of the Spirit at the time of His baptism was in response to prayer. It was after prayer that at His transfiguration "the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment became white and dazzling." At the grave of Lazarus, while Lazarus was still in his grave, our Lord in the consciousness of the Divine Power that would be made manifest said: "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard me. And I knew that Thou hearest me always."

What then of the possibility of unanswered prayer in the experience of our Lord? Even if there were no specific instances in the record, we might conclude for our comfort in days such as some of us are living through, that He knew all about it. We are told, you remember, that He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." If our Lord never knew unanswered prayer He was a stranger to one of the most dreadful of human temptations—the temptation because of unanswered prayer to doubt God, and despair of self. But there are several incidents which, from the angle at least of our dim, human seeing, point to quite an opposite conclusion.

One of the great days of His life, among the

very greatest, was the day on which He chose His twelve disciples. So much in every enterprise depends upon having the right men to initiate and develop it! In the infinite wonder of His work and of His way, God has chosen to do His work through the weakness and unworthiness of men. Of many a Divine purpose, and to many a lagging soul to-day God is saying as He said to Lot of the city he sought to save, "I cannot do any thing until thou be come thither." Our Lord recognised the importance of the choice of His disciples; it was on that occasion we are told, that "He continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day He called unto Him His disciples: and of them He chose twelve." Picture that lonely Figure on the mountain top, while the city slumbered beneath, and in it the twelve men all unconscious of the greatness of destiny that was opening before them. Surely in the presence of His Father Jesus named them one by one, surely He prayed that there might be no false choices, that they might be made ready for the task to which they were being called, and for the descent of the Spirit who was to come upon them. And the result? Well, an odd assortment of human frailties and oddities, vanities, contradictions and ambitions, but a group of men with that one great quality with which God Almighty can work through the ages—a certain rugged responsive-

ness—personal loyalty and devoted love. But listen to the list. He chose, you remember, as St. Luke tells us, Simon, Andrew, James and John, and so on, "and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor." Our Lord poured out His heart to His Father about the twelve, and out of it came the treachery and the tragedy of the betrayal.

Now I do not forget that in the New Testament the choice and the infamous work of Judas seem sometimes to be represented as foreordained and foreseen of God. And there is a great truth there which comes quite within the range, I think, of our understanding, namely, that God uses the free choices of evil men as well as the free choices of good men to work out His purposes; that He makes the wrath and the folly of men as well as their wisdom and devotion to praise Him. And I do not forget that word of St. John that Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray Him. But when I read that "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him," I cannot think that there was ever a moment, until that last moment when in conscious shame he went out and hanged himself, that Judas might not have been saved. For that reason I cannot think, interpreting Scripture by Scripture, that our Lord chose Judas and sent him forth to preach knowing that inevitably he would betray Him. No

man can understand the character of Judas or begin to interpret him, I think, who thinks of him as from the earliest days an incarnation of evil. Notice that the record says, "Judas, who became a traitor." I think of him, rather, as one in whom Christ saw tremendous possibilities, as a preacher perhaps of unusual power, with certain winning qualities, whose great weakness was that he knew more than his Lord. And to me the most significant and suggestive thing about that incident in the upper room is, not that there was a traitor there, but that every man of the twelve thought it might be he. And so it seems to me that this prayer of our Lord must be viewed from our human angle as one which, partially at least, issued in disappointment and disaster.

There are other incidents: I can only mention them. The prayer in the Garden is one whose force you will all recognise. For here we are permitted to hear our Lord at prayer. "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass"; and the cup did not pass. I do not forget the last clause of the prayer, the perfect surrender to His Father's will. But first there is the passionate outpouring of His soul, as recorded by St. Luke when he makes Him say, "Remove this cup," and it did not pass. There was the cry, "Father, save me from this hour." There was the cry upon the Cross when for a moment the presence of the Divine

Father seemed to be hidden from Him, and when He used the words of the twenty-second Psalm to utter the longing of His soul, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" And there was the great prayer of intercession recorded in the seventeenth of St. John, a prayer offered not alone for the twelve, but "for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me." Think of the sequel to-day after nearly twenty centuries of faith and service, of the tragic rents and tears in the garment of Christ, of the divided Church, and the nominally Christian nations emerging slowly from a death grapple, and who does not feel that to this passionate prayer of our Lord the answer is long delayed?

What then from all this may we say for our comfort and guidance in our times of unanswered prayer?

I think it is well to notice that any such experience, whatever it meant in our Lord's life—and I am not attempting for a moment to dogmatise about that—was only momentary. I do not know any experience that suggests the struggle of our Lord's life, and the victory, more than that incident to which I referred a moment ago, when there is first the cry, "Father, save me from

this hour"—the cry of human frailty, the limitation which our Lord in His flesh took upon Him for us men, and then just in a moment, "but for this cause came I unto this hour,"—the Divine insight. "If it be possible, let this cup pass"; and just in a moment, "Nevertheless, not as I will." "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" And in a moment, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

> "Not so in haste, my heart,
> Have faith in God, and wait;
> Although He linger long,
> He never comes too late."

Certainly our Lord would counsel us in times when prayer seems futile not to stop praying. There was nothing which He more constantly impressed upon men than the need of persistence in prayer. Some of His parables, you remember, taught specifically that "men ought always to pray, and not to faint," parables in which He drove in just that one point; like that of the man who comes to his friend's house at midnight, when the friend is sound asleep in bed with his children, and wants three loaves to feed a guest, for whom the friend does not feel any responsibility; and our Lord says that after he has protested and said, "Do not trouble me," yet he will give him the loaves, give him all he wants, not because

he has asked for it, but just because he has kept at it persistently. And there is the same lesson in the case of the judge and the poor woman who asks to have a wrong avenged, the judge who fears not God nor regards man; not because he cares anything about the widow, says our Lord, but because persistently she makes her appeal, he will come to her rescue. It is our Lord's symbol of the unfailing persistence with which you and I are to present our appeals to God.

Then of course we recognise in His experience, in the experience of St. Paul, in the experience of many Christians, that prayer is answered often, answered richly and wonderfully, although in ways quite different from the ways men sought. You remember St. Paul's prayer to be relieved of his thorn, which, however, was not taken away, but grace was given him gloriously to bear it. Oh, do not dictate terms to God. You will go away and pray about your dear ones, about the things that are very precious and essential in your life as you see it; and sometimes that prayer will not seem to be answered as you want it. You may pray for your child's life, and your child's life may be taken from you. Remember, I beg of you, that physical values are the least values with God; that His rewards are infinitely greater than comfort and luxury and prosperity. Always then the vision of the larger plan. Always the Divine

alternative—"nevertheless, not my will, but Thine." In that vast and beautiful territory of the soul there is no unanswered prayer.

And finally, may we not say reverently that our Lord himself was the great answer to His unanswered prayers. That life so brutally wronged, so sadly misunderstood, so lonely, rejected of men, yet ever going about doing good, never despairing, always thinking of others, often weary but never too weary to serve men, finding worth in the least, counting the humblest man one of the priceless values of God, going at last to the Cross for us men and our sins—when we read that He "learned obedience by the things which he suffered," must we not feel that there was wonderful meaning for Him in those dark experiences after which we are told, "angels ministered unto him." So in some degree, in His strength, it may be with us. If out of your prayers there shall come to you a new sense of the sovereign will of God, a new strength for humble service; if because of them you are persistent in effort, patient in trial, confident when others are giving up, cheerful when clouds hang heavy, and thoughtful of others when racked with pain and anguish, then you and many others through you—no, not you, but Christ in you—will be the answer to your unanswered prayers.

I want to publish here a letter which I have

been glad to read a great many times in recent years, because I have always felt that if I had said nothing that helped men this letter could not fail to touch them. It was written, his last letter, by a young relative of my wife's family, Captain Gordon Barber of the First Cameronian Highlanders, who died in the field in July, 1916, aged twenty-three. He was from his earliest years the child of prayer, consecrated to God by his Christian parents. I want you to think, as you hear this letter and remember that he died at twenty-three, whether or not his mother's prayers were answered, or could have been answered more beautifully.

"My Dearest Father and Mother:

"I am writing this line in a moment of quiet in the certain knowledge that very soon we shall go over the parapet. If you receive this letter I want you to take it as my last message to you both.

"Whatsoever be my fate, I have no fear, for the God who has watched over me from infancy will care for me still. I rejoice that in the time of my country's need I was ready to take my place and my share in the greatest war of history. I rejoice that I have recovered from the wounds that I sustained at the beginning, and that for eight months now I have been back with the battalion that I love so well. If I fall it is God's will, and it is best for me. Do not think of me as dead, but rather as living the great and glorious

life of that happy band of warriors who have fought a good fight and fallen in the faith. After all, that is only the key to life everlasting. So think of me rather as supremely happy in the Arms whose protection is sure, and whose care is infinite.

"I want to thank you for all you have done for me, for my education and training, and giving me the chance of the noble profession of arms. However much we may loathe and detest it in its details, in this war I know we have right and Christianity on our side.

"I die happy, glorying indeed in the manner of my death, and with you, my dearest parents and friends, ever in my thought. Good-bye. God be with you all.

"Ever your loving and devoted son,

"GORDON."

And his mother in sending the letter adds: "Our dear braw laddie was at his post when God called him. Now we are left at ours."

May God help us all to keep that lonely post, wherever it be, in the firm assurance of His presence and of His power!

Chapter XIV

Christian Self-Love

Thou shalt love—thyself.
MATTHEW 22:39.

It is significant that Jesus should have told men to love themselves, for when he said, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," he put the two on the same plane. There is, of course, a self-love which is utterly unChristlike. The first sermon printed in America had for its theme, "The Sin and Danger of Self-Love" and for its text, "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth." It was preached by Robert Cushman to the Pilgrim Fathers in Plymouth Colony in 1621, and it would have been well if in connection with the three hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the Pilgrims it could have had fresh utterance in every church in the land. "It is reported," he says, "that there are many men gone to that other plantation in Virginia which, whilst they lived in England seemed very religious, zealous and conscionable, and have now lost even the sap of grace and are become mere worldlings." It was this type of self-love which our Lord had in view

when he warned men against the modern gospel of safety first—consideration for one's own ease and comfort and pleasure as the supreme thing in life; "Whosoever wills to save his life shall lose it." There are many examples of such self-love in the New Testament. There is the Pharisee, profoundly impressed with his own superiority and grateful to God for his exclusiveness—"Father, I thank Thee that I am not as other men"—who in God's presence felt (as some men feel to-day) how generous he had been, how large his offerings, how beautiful his sacrifice. "I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all I possess." The man was madly in love with himself. There is the man who in profound self-appreciation says, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." This is an ancient example of an exceedingly modern self-love which is not only self-defeating but world-wrecking. "O Lord," an up-country suppliant once exclaimed at the week-night prayer meeting, "the more I sees of other people, the more I likes myself." "I find no sweeter fat than sticks to my own bones," sings one of the poets. "I to myself am dearer than a friend," says Proteus in "Two Gentlemen of Verona." These are modern instances of self-love of the wrong sort.

But there is a self-love which is not only entirely Christian, but essential in Christian disci-

pleship. What are some of its elements, the things of which it is made?

1. At the root of Christian self-love is self-reverence, a grateful recognition of the worth and dignity and priceless value of the human spirit, and a realisation that this supreme product of creative power is in our hands to bring to completion, or to ruin. That was a great word which Sir Charles Lyell said once to a friend who apologised to him for giving so much attention to a minute specimen of natural history. "Any single point," said Sir Charles, "is the universe." In every individual life the whole vastness and mystery of the universe, its meaning and its destiny are at stake. What God means, what man means, are problems whose solution is concentrated today in your life and mine. Constantly the Bible seems to suggest that we do not think highly enough of our human nature. Man is made in the image of God. "Thou hast made him," cries the Psalmist, "but little lower than God." There is in us some remnant of the infinite and eternal which, often lost to view, often hard to believe in, has never been crushed out, and to God's eyes is always in view. He hath set eternity in our hearts. Is not this the wonderful meaning of the incarnation? In a life like yours and mine with its everyday relations, opportunities, perplexities and tasks, the life of a son, a friend, a workman,

a sufferer, God made His great approach to man, God did His great work for man. Constantly Jesus, warning men against self-confidence, teaching them humility and dependence, yet also gives them the thought that they are more than they have thought themselves, sees in them possibilities they never dreamed of, calls the unstable Peter a rock, and sees in the poor, sin-stained soul whom all despise a woman at prayer. What wonderful glimpses St. Paul gives us as a basis for Christian self-love! We are co-workers with God: in the marvel of His love God has chosen to do His work through the weakness and unworthiness of man. Or this, ye are the temple of God. A temple is a sacred place. That which the sacred place expresses in my life—passionate devotion to some high ideal, great need which only God can satisfy —is in some way expressed for God in the human spirit, yours and mine. What a tragedy that men called to such high destiny should make of living a cheap and petty thing! But, remember, self-reverence is very different from self-admiration. It is something that makes a man very humble, drives him to his knees with a keen sense of the gulf between the man he is and the man he should be. It issues, if it be genuine, not in pride, but in penitence and new purpose leading us to cry, "Father, I have sinned," "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

2. And so I come very directly to the second point. In Christian self-love there is constant emphasis on self-development, a passionate eagerness for the larger and fuller self. "Learn," says Maeterlinck, "to love yourself with a love that is large and complete." Here is the trouble, that the selves we try to love are often so small, and undeveloped, and therefore so unlovable. Is it any wonder that we find them hard to live with? There is not in them breadth of territory enough, breadth of interest enough, to keep us from going stale. That was a great word of the Psalmist who had felt his life for a time sadly hemmed in, but now, under the Divine guidance, saw boundaries bursting, new vistas opening before him. "Thou hast brought me," he cried, "into a large room." What constitutes selfishness for many a man is not that he thinks of himself and plans for himself. It is that the self he thinks and plans for is such a microscopic self, in which there is nothing Godlike at all. No doubt to speak of the Christian programme for the individual as enlarged and enlightened self-interest is for some minds a perilous suggestion. But there is a sense in which it is true, the sense our Lord had in view when he said, "He that wills to lose his life—shall find it." The life freely given for some great end comes back immeasurably enriched. But first a man must lose it in new areas of in-

terest and service which he has never known before, which probably have seemed for him impossible before. Every new identification of one's life with others is the building of an addition to the house of life. A man's interests, it has well been said, are the measure of himself. To keep is to be poor: to share is to multiply. "Gentlemen, you should study larger maps," was the saying of a British prime minister to his colleagues whose minds rarely travelled beyond the range of national self-interest. It is the essential programme of Christian self-love. How much we are all in need of larger boundaries in the matter of prayer. Our prayers are so apt to be utterly selfish. "Bless me and my wife, my son John and his wife, us four and no more," is the typical prayer of the microscopic self. How different the prayers of that invalid girl confined month after month to her room who broke through the limitations of a narrow fate and entered in loving sympathy hundreds of unknown homes by making it her habit to remember in her prayers the bereaved families of whom she read in the newspapers. Dr. Fleming gives a fine example of the expanding self in the Punjab Christian Gulu, "Once a desperate character amongst the outcastes, he is now known as one of God's great intercessors. One day Gulu came to his American friend and said, "Sahib, teach me some geography." "Why, Gulu,

what do you want with geography at your age?" "Sahib, I wish to study geography so that I may know more about which to pray." So to love one's self in obedience to Christ is to love ever more deeply the life God's love and mercy have opened to us, the work He has given us to do, the friends who stimulate and inspire, yes, even the difficulties which draw out the best that is in us; it is to love with eager anticipation the secret which God has in store for us beyond the night of death.

3. In Christian self-love the love of God comes first, and the love of the neighbour is on the same plane as the love of self. "John Smith first" is a perilous motto for the individual, as "America First" is a perilous slogan for the nation. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" is the supreme rule for the Christian; and the whole tragedy of twisted personality, and wrecked and embittered human relations, comes from the effort to take God from His throne of supremacy.

This, let us be clear, is not the arbitrary order enacted by a divine autocrat, it is not a matter of numerical succession or of diplomatic precedence in the courts of Heaven, it is in the very nature of things. It must be so. God is not God unless He be supreme. If He does not reign in our lives, if we give Him second place, or third, dismiss

Him for to-day, keeping Him in some anteroom of the soul for use in an indefinite sometime, if God does not reign in our lives, for us He does not exist. And of course we cannot love God without sharing His love, without entering into His mind and heart; and so comes inevitably the love of the neighbour which is simply the normal expression of the love of God, "For if a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" And one cannot love God and love his neighbour without being impelled to a richer love of self that to the service of his fellows he may bring the fulness of his God-given powers. In all this there is no conflict of love. It is not three loves in persistent rivalry, but one—the love of life in the perfection of its relations and in the fulness of its powers. But it must begin with the love of God, for He is our life, and we are nothing apart from Him.

The tragedy of the world to-day, the root of all our trouble, is that so commonly men, and even men who call themselves Christians, are beginning at the other end, seeking to evolve out of self-interest, self first, some scheme of human relations which will meet the needs of humanity. All such efforts must inevitably fail. The lesson we must learn, however slow and painful the process by which we learn it, is that we must begin

with God, with His universal purpose for all the sons of men, with His scheme of human relations revealed in Jesus Christ and in the conscience of mankind. Only so will the individual life be safe, and enter into its heritage.

Chapter XV

Ways and Paths

In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.

Proverbs 3:6.

That is a great promise, one of the greatest of Scripture. Every earnest man would wish to believe that there is a Guiding Hand upon his life, an all-wise Plan working in and through all his planning. Like all promises of the Bible, it is a promise with a condition, a condition not arbitrarily set, but essential, in the very nature of things. A man must work with God or God cannot work with him.

What does it mean to acknowledge God? I notice, first, that it is an acknowledgment in all our ways: it must not be partial or occasional. I am not to acknowledge God at times, about some things, but constantly and completely in all my ways. I wonder if it is not just at this point that many a man has to revise his religious life if it is to be thoroughgoing, if it is to be satisfying to himself and have the ring of reality to others. We incline, many of us, to confine God to certain parts, certain experiences of life—the critical de-

cision, the great anxiety, the impending danger, the sickness that may mean death—then we are ready to acknowledge God, and cry to Him for help. But the thought that is most often with me to-day in the intimacy of my soul, of what I would like to do, of what I would like to have, of what I would like to happen, somehow in this intensely vivid sphere of personality I do not think of God as I should. I do not realise that in the working out of the plans so dear to me He has a supreme place, that I had better think of Him more than of any other. One feels at once that this was the big thing in the religion of Jesus. It concerned the whole of life, not a part of it. His Father's will, His Father's work touched and transformed even the simplest things, the every-day contacts of life. In the structure of His soul there were no watertight compartments. Of His life, as of the garment He wore, it might have been written that it was without seam, all of a piece, and woven from the top throughout. It never seemed to enter our Lord's mind that life would be a less joyous thing for men if they acknowledged God in all their ways—the very reverse. It is because men have not given God full sway in their souls, that they suffer or are anxious or go wrong. "Your Father knoweth" is His great word of every human experience. "The very hairs of your head are numbered."

And Paul has the same thought of the universal concern of God with the whole of life. "All things," he says, "work together (not singly) for good to those who love God." And "God giveth us richly all things to enjoy." Here then is the first question for the man who is earnest in his religion. Am I ready to acknowledge God in all my ways, or are there certain intimacies of thought, of ambition, of self-indulgence to which I am not ready to bid him welcome?

But what are these ways in all of which I am to acknowledge God? A way is a manner of living, a direction of thought and effort. A man's ways are his spiritual habits. First among these ways in which we must acknowledge God, as it seems to me, is the way of faith. We must be able to say to ourselves, not necessarily in all the detail of the historic creeds, but in their great overshadowing reality, "I believe." I want to emphasise here two things about faith, choice and culture—the choice of faith and the culture of faith. Have you thought of it that faith to many a man is a choice? We are apt to think that faith simply happens to some people, while it escapes others. And I know, of course, that there is an environment of faith which makes it easier for a man to believe than if he were in another environment, and there are experiences which help faith as there are experiences which make it more diffi-

cult. But back of all this is choice, definite and concrete. In times when the foundations of life seem to totter, when the things that are shaken seem to be in the foreground, do I choose still to believe in God? Do I choose to believe in Jesus Christ, that in Him as in no other God has been heard from, and has done His very best for man? Do I choose to believe in an immortal destiny of gain or loss? Do I choose to believe in any plight the best and the most about God, the universe, and the soul? "For one," Professor William James used to say to his students at Harvard, "I choose to believe in God." "Each of us," some one has recently said, "must voluntarily choose and voluntarily keep the great attainment of a living consciousness of the living God." And so it is not simply a choice once for all. Such a choice soon becomes shadowy and unreal, like the choice of a young man who joins the church, and then does nothing more about it. It must be a persistent choice. We must choose over and over again. And so we need the culture of faith, definite means by which faith may be nourished and strengthened. Shall I mention two such means—the reading every day of faith-building books, and especially the Book which is the great faith-builder, and the companionship of faith-building men and women. The father of John Ruskin wrote of him once, "He has just gone

from a hurried dinner to the sunset, which he visits as regularly as a soldier does his evening parade." If we do not with some such regularity visit the sunset, is it any wonder if we live in the grime? The strange thing is not that faith dies out in many men; the strange thing is that even in an anemic form it survives, when we think how little heed they give to it, how little care to feed it and build it up.

Another of the ways in which we are to acknowledge God is the way of Prayer—not the careless muttering of formal prayers, not occasional prayer for something that seems to me essential in a fair-dealing universe, but that habit of mind which makes us recognise that there is One with us to whom our lives are a real concern and a present task, One in whom we live and move and have our being, who is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. I acknowledge God by recognising that He is the supreme source of wisdom, guidance and power and by recognising the dreadful folly and danger of separating myself even for a moment from Him.

And then I acknowledge God by the way of Love. Love is a very large word. It includes, for instance, righteousness. I cannot love God and love men and have any crookedness in my dealings, any tortuous devices of self-deceit by

which I delude myself with the thought that a good end will ever excuse a wrong means, or any twistings of self-interest by which I seek to combine the good opinion of men with some selfish scheme for my own material good. It includes forgiveness. Is there anything that so evidences the grace of God in a man's soul, anything that is such an acknowledgment of Him, and anything the world so needs to-day as readiness to forgive—the hatred of sin and the banishment of bitterness toward the sinner, the eagerness to make, if he only will, a new and better beginning with him.

> "Hushed be every thought that springs
> From out the bitterness of things."

And of course love includes sacrificial service. To have grace to lose sight of oneself in some task of human weal is to acknowledge God, for without Him who can?

And now the promise to the man who acknowledges God in all his ways is that God will direct his paths. There is a contrast to be noticed between ways and paths. Way is the more general word. A way is a manner of life, a general direction in which one chooses to go. It hints at a goal toward which one is pressing on. But a path is more definite and specific. It is the next step, the immediate line of progress; it is the trail

by which I keep in the way. And the promise is that here in the tracing out of life step by step, in the working out of plan and programme, if I acknowledge God in all my ways He will direct me: a firmer hand than mine will be on the helm. Often the course may seem dangerous and disastrous. Often there may seem to be no course at all. Sometimes it may even seem to issue in wreck. But never fear: we will reach the haven. This has not simply been the sustaining faith, but the transforming experience of some of the world's great leaders in many spheres of life, the place where, as it seemed to them in many a perplexing day, faith gripped and became experience. Often it is only in the after-view that a man recognises the Guiding Hand. "Now I begin to understand," wrote Hawthorne of his years as an assistant clerk in the custom-house, when, conscious of certain gifts, every opportunity for their exercise seemed to be denied him. "Now I begin to understand why I was imprisoned so many years in this lonely chamber, and why I could never break through these viewless bolts and bars." As a young man, on the introduction of a friend, I called on the late William T. Stead at his office in London to talk with him on the problem I was then facing, whether I should continue in journalism in which I had spent seven years or respond to an inner appeal, which I had never been able

to silence, to enter the ministry. When I told him my story, he pointed to an inscription over his mantel—it was the great word of my text, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct thy paths." "I am a good deal of a Puritan," he went on, "I have built my life on that faith, and it has never failed me. I believe that if God means you to make a radical change in your life, in some way He will make His will very clear to you." Then he outlined one way in which God's will might be made clear, a way which very singularly was realised a few months later just as he suggested.

There is one thing more to be said about the difference between a way and a path. A way may not have been trodden before: a path has. Peary found the way to the North Pole, Livingstone to the heart of Africa, but they found no path leading them there. They made the path for others. Don't forget that yours is a path, that Christ has been over it every step, that there is no experience of difficulty and darkness and antagonism which He does not know, and that He is by your side to guide you in it every day. In all Thy ways acknowledge Him and He will direct thy paths.

Make us ready, Lord, to acknowledge Thee in all our ways. Some of us have been closing doors

against Thee, saying "Here, Lord," and "Here," but not "There." Some of us have been giving Thee only lip service. Show us wherein we have failed of our finer selves, and draw us wholeheartedly to Thee. Some of us have been trying to acknowledge Thee in all our ways, but we cannot see the path in which Thou hast promised to direct us. Help us at such times to remember Him who in Gethsemane seemed for a moment to lose the path and cried, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" but soon saw again the path leading right up to a cross and said, All is well, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

Chapter XVI

The Judgment of Idle Words

> I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.
>
> —Matthew 12:36.

This is a searching saying. On first thought it leaves an unpleasant impression. It seems to picture our Lord as a champion of forbidding and impossible standards. Just think of every word that escapes the lips through the years being noted by a heavenly detective, and treasured up against some ultimate crisis when we will face a Great Accuser and stand trial for our words and deeds. Would not such a thought throw a shadow over life, and take from our contact with one another all its naturalness and good cheer?

Nor is the asperity of the saying softened if we note the special kind of word which is thus to enter into the Great Indictment—"every idle word." It means in the original not simply every careless, casual word, but every word that does not work, every barren, futile, inefficient word. Here is one who conceives words as forces, passing out into the life of men, releasing springs of

action, bringing forth results. And this, of course, is quite in line with our Lord's teaching. There were two sins with which He seems to have been impatient almost beyond any other. The one was hypocrisy—mere pose, playing a part, pretending to be what one is not, pretending not to be what one is. The other was inefficiency, unproductiveness—the man who hid his talent, the tree that bore no fruit. As applied broadly to the influence of a man's life, the Christian responds readily enough to such a standard. But as a test for one's words and every one of them, it seems to be quite out of reach. Before, however, we dismiss this word as impracticable let us look at it more closely, for He spake with authority and He spake as never man spake. Two or three things thrown light upon it.

1. It is to be remembered that Jesus never pictures the Christian life as an easy life—the very reverse. He constantly appeals for the impossible, constantly confronts His friends with the standards of the world and asks them what better theirs are than these. He puts the ideal so high that men are staggered by it and, like that group of early disciples, turn back and follow Him no more. But to the man who presses on, crying, "Who is sufficient for these things?" His answer is, "With God all things are possible." It is a big question for the average Christian

whether he is attempting anything in life big enough to require in it the energies of Almighty God.

2. Then surely our Lord is true to experience when He bids us think earnestly of the importance of our words. In one sense there are no idle words: they are all workers for good or ill. They are creators of atmosphere, moulders of those subtle influences that pass from life to life, transmitters of courage and love and hope, or of bitterness, despair and death. To the man to whom refinement of soul is an ideal, a study of the conversations of Jesus is richly rewarding. His choice of words is worth noting. Few of them are words expressive of the mechanism of life, the gains and gettings, the furniture and fittings of existence. They are words which concern our permanent and ultimate human relations, words like life, love, light, power, knowledge, eternity—God. And constantly He made words over, gave them richer meaning. That is to say, words as He used them expanded, revealed new vistas of thought and experience. They were no longer combinations of letters: they became voices of a living soul. This is another way to say that Jesus habitually elevated conversation. You may search your New Testament from beginning to end and you will find nothing of the tattle of tongues about people, no criticism for criticism's

sake, it is always sympathetic and constructive; no gossip and scandal. What hours of tea-table talk, what columns of newspaper stuff, are hidden away between the lines of the New Testament—the graft of Zaccheus, the moral leprosy of Mary Magdalene, the sordid commercialism of the rich young ruler, the quarrellings of the twelve! It is all summed up in this; the failings and failures of men aroused in Jesus pity and eagerness to help, never the disposition simply to talk about them. There is certainly an appeal here for the elevation of what some one has called "the lost art of conversation." I have not in mind, of course, that priggishness which is constantly suggesting how much one knows. What charm in conversation like that of Huxley, as described by Sir Spencer Walpole, "Conversation founded on knowledge, enlarged by memory, enlightened by humour."

3. The permanent importance of one's words is to be found not simply in their influence upon others. The thought of Jesus passes frankly from the bitter words of His critics to the men who utter them. There is the tragedy that rends His heart of love. They have called Him glutton, blasphemer, prince of devils, etc. But hurt as His sensitive soul must have been by this blind and reasonless enmity, it aroused in our Lord no resentment, no impulse to give bitterness for bit-

terness. "Whosoever," he said, "shall speak a word against the Son of Man it shall be forgiven him"—Dr. Parker has said there is no better evidence of the divinity of our Lord than these words, a forecast as they were of His prayer on the cross, "Father, forgive them." But there is a sin, He says, which cannot be forgiven. How our fathers agonised over the unpardonable sin! One thing we may be sure of is that no man commits that sin who cares deeply about it, no man who is searching his own soul with shame and crying, "God, be merciful." It is the sin of the man who sees clearly the light and blinds his eyes to it, who hears the promptings of the voice divine and habitually and persistently turns to them a deaf ear, who in the secret places of the soul day by day is speaking a word against all those impulses to better things which are the whispers of the Holy Spirit of God. The sin is unforgivable not because God will not forgive, but because the man himself has forever closed the door against the love and the leading of God.

Words, then, are as the fruit of the tree: the tragedy is not the corrupt fruit, it is the withering, rotting tree. And so Jesus points His hearers back of the careless word to the character it expresses. Every word is registered there. The words are symptoms of a soul, indices of character and conduct, thermometers that with unfail-

ing accuracy register the spiritual temperature. I do not therefore think of the judgment of which our Lord speaks so much as a great assize of distant days in which a heavenly prosecutor is to stagger us with a record of all our careless, tactless words; but rather as an ultimate experience in which the personality built through the years of thoughts and words and deeds—these are the brick and mortar of the soul—will come into the presence of the Infinite Purity and Love to receive the reward of the things done in the body and to go forward to the things unseen, unheard, undreamed, which God has in store for those who love Him. The account will be written not in some book up there, but in the character carved and chiselled here.

It is interesting to notice that modern scientific teaching at times confirms such a suggestion as this of our Lord. A recent magazine article on the wonders of wireless communication was widely read. Among its interesting suggestions, as the author permitted his fancy to range over the vast developments discovered and to be discovered was this, that even a man's thoughts may write themselves on the invisible ether, and have permanent record there. "I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."

Chapter XVII

A Communion Address

I want to find suggestion for our Communion thought in three very simple and familiar words which our Lord spoke at the first celebration of the Supper—"Take," "Do," "Shew." They are all little words. But how often the little words are the big words. What a vastness is packed into nine letters in the greatest sentence in literature—"God is Love."

1. "Take." The Church is forever asking men to give, we are told. "I am weary of perpetual appeals"—how often one hears it. "You can't go to church to worship like a gentleman without being held up by some ecclesiastical brigand. Religion is becoming identified with vast money-raising movements. For years men were content to talk in thousands; under the influence of the war they talked in millions, now in billions." It is perfectly true. But this morning there is a change in the programme—no, not quite that, a change in the emphasis. To-day Christ is asking you to receive—"Take."

Have you ever thought of it that it is a difficult thing to receive graciously and gratefully, without

the least suggestion of being beggared, of being patronised? I have a dear friend who has mastered the art of giving as beautifully as any man I know. Keen and successful for many years in business, he is always doing the most surprising things in the broad realm of giving. I gather from what he has told me that in his thought receiving is a much more difficult thing than giving. He seems to think that people who receive in the right spirit do him a great favour, and he is constantly amazed at the number of people who do not know how to receive—I wonder if this may not have been the experience of our Lord. My friend has often quoted these lines to me:

> "I hold him great who for Love's sake
> Can give with open generous will;
> But him who takes for Love's sweet sake
> I think I hold more generous still."

In order to receive happily and helpfully, we must of course want the thing we receive. Of our gifts at Christmas we have sometimes said with a polite insincerity which comes too readily to the lips, "How lovely of you. It was just what I needed." And then the gift goes into a drawer or upon a shelf, for it filled no real need in our life.

And in order to receive happily and helpfully we must have room for that which we are to re-

ceive. A friend gives you a great, bulky gift. It was kindly meant no doubt, but really! You look around your rooms and say, "Where in the world could I put it?" And then when you can do it safely, without danger of being found out, it goes to the rummage sale for the Old Ladies' Home.

What is it Christ asks us to receive to-day—bread and wine? Yes, these are the symbols without; what is the reality within? It is Christ himself, nothing else and nothing less. "This," he said, "is My body: this is My blood." The thing these first friends of His dreaded above everything else was that He was going away from them. "It is expedient for you," he said, "that I go away." They could not understand Him. But He said also, "I will not leave you orphans: I will come to you." And here was the wonderful way in which the promise was to be fulfilled. "When you eat of this bread and drink of this cup in remembrance of Me," he seems to say, "I will be with you and in you far more constantly, far more powerfully, than I could when I was with you in the flesh." "Take"—the gift of which this feast speaks is the gift of Christ.

But do you and I really want to receive Christ?—that is the big question. For if we should receive Him many things will result, one, for instance, of which I spoke a moment ago—giving

will no longer be the insistent and irritating trial we have often thought it. It will become the very atmosphere and necessity and great joy of life. The giving of things? Yes, but only the giving of things as the expression of the one supreme and constant gift, the gift of self, at the place where the need is greatest and the fight is hottest. And then have we room for Christ? We are so busy, so much occupied with so many things—business, pleasure, ambition. These are questions we must ask as we hear Christ's tender and appealing "Take."

2. "Do." "This do," said our Lord; not first, you notice, "This think" or "this feel," but "This do." It is very significant that Jesus, seeking to deepen the life of his friends, so as to equip them for all the difficult and testing experiences that lay before them, gave them something to do. What was this something? Here again there are the symbol and the reality. "When you come together," he seemed to say, "keep the memorial feast in remembrance of Me." Yes, but this was only the beginning, only the means of entrance into a task larger far. "This," he said, "is My broken body, this is My shed blood." Now, remember, if you have received Christ you henceforth are the body of Christ. "All that you have seen My body do for men—carry Me about, bring

Me to men, shew them the Father—*you* must do. All that I now do with this bread—break it—*you* must do. You must break your stubborn self-will; you must crucify the lusts of the flesh. You must spend your life even to the death in self-forgetful devotion, in complete sacrifice. Ye are my friends if ye do the things which I command you." "THIS DO."

Splendidly and loyally these men of old did it. Whenever they gathered together they remembered the symbol Jesus had given them—they broke bread in remembrance of Him. But they remembered also that which the symbol signified. The fainthearts of old became, most of them, fearless martyrs for Christ whose broken body and shed blood were the seed of the Church.

3. "Shew"—proclaim is the word—in clear and unmistakable terms. "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup ye do shew forth the Lord's death till He come."

Is not this what the world needs above everything else to-day, to be shown Jesus Christ as a living reality in the hearts and lives of men—to be shown Christ crucified not simply as an event of long ago but as an experience to-day in lives which have forgotten self and given themselves, all they are and have, to the service of God and of men? By this service we bear testimony to

our desire to receive Christ, and pledge ourselves to do as he bids us: but this testimony makes but little impression on the world unless it has the backing of an everyday life which shows the same spirit. Shall I give you one or two illustrations of the need that the church, that is, you and I, should shew Jesus Christ to the world to-day?

Dr. Speer in a recent book tells of an interview he had recently with one of the most distinguished men in the life of India whom he asked frankly as to his own attitude toward Christ and the likelihood of any large development in the response of India to Christ. His answer, flashed out in a moment, was, "Jesus Christ is hopelessly handicapped by his association with the West." So often we keep the forms. But we do not shew Jesus Christ to men.

A young Chinese student who sat at my table not long ago when asked his impressions of a great conference of students from which he had just returned answered: "It meant very much to all of us, students from foreign countries, to see there a great company of young American Christians thoroughly in earnest in their devotion to the cause of Christ. You know in China the Christians are all very much in earnest, but when we come to this Christian country we do not always find the spirit of Christ triumphant, or even recognised, and it troubles us." Somehow in our

favoured homeland we do not shew the Chinese and Japanese Jesus Christ as the missionaries do.

The same condition came prominently to notice during the war. Most of the soldiers believed in God, prayed in their own way before they went into battle, had a respectful attitude toward Jesus Christ, but not one fifth of them had had any vital connection with the Church before the war, or recognised the Church as the modern incarnation of Christ Himself. For most persons, it has been said, the documents of Christianity are men and women. And these documents somehow are not in circulation, or they are not in the language of the people.

To realise the need, and desire sincerely to meet it, to respond with any earnestness at all to Christ's "Do" and "Shew" is to feel that we can only do so if we end as we began by listening to His "Take." What wonderful results would follow if we should indeed receive to-day life and love and power beyond our own. Shall we not dare to believe it possible, oh, ye of little faith? Shall we not dare to believe that there may issue from this service lives made over, immeasurably beautified and enriched, homes cleansed of all bitterness and misunderstanding, business houses with a new atmosphere, keen as ever but just and kindly. If so I suspect that not only the city, but the whole of America, and even the whole world

would know the result. Are you ready to sing from the heart

"Oh, Lord, with shame and sorrow
We open now the door;
Dear Saviour, enter, enter,
And leave us never more."

Chapter XVIII

The Wearied Christ and the Wearied Christian

> Jesus, being wearied with His journey, sat thus by the well.
>
> —John 4:6.

I am glad to read that Jesus was weary, for it tells us one or two things about Him. For one thing, it tells us that when God showed himself to men in human form, when in John's great phrase, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us," the identification of God with our humanity in its frailty and its need was complete. It was no mere pose, no playing of a part as though one should put on old clothes for a night to go slumming. He held Himself back from nothing that is our lot. It is the same lesson suggested to us in that phrase of the Creed which has caused so much discussion, "He descended into hell." What that means in the material realm I do not know; in the realm of the spirit it means that our Lord, having loved us, loved us to the end; it means that He drank the cup of human experience to the dregs, that He explored every dark recess of our lot for us men and our salvation so that no man sorely tested, almost ready to give up, could ever

say to God, "You know nothing about it." And so I come to the other thing which the weariness of Christ tells us, that when you and I are weary, out of patience with ourselves and with the world, when our hearts crave above all a friend who will understand, a guide who has been over our ground, a Saviour who can bring to our weakness power, courage to try again, and hope to press on with eager step, we have in Jesus such a Friend and Helper and Saviour, not one who is so far above us that He knows nothing about us, but one who knows what is in man, who learned obedience by the things which He suffered, who cried once, "I thirst," and again, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

There are of course various kinds of weariness. There is physical weariness, such as our Lord seems to have experienced here. He was wearied with His journey, tired out with the long tramp in the hot sun. One word in the narrative we are apt to pass over without realising its meaning. Jesus, being wearied, sat *thus* by the well. "Thus" means "just as He was." It is the picture of a tired man throwing himself down anywhere and anyhow, "without any kind of preparation and not much caring where it is that he rests." But physical weariness is not the most trying kind. It is perfectly natural and will pass. There is a hint of a deeper weariness in our Lord's expe-

rience. The first verse suggests it. "When therefore the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptising more disciples than John, He left Judea and departed again into Galilee." He had been made to feel an atmosphere of antagonism, of jealousy, of suspicion; and nothing wearies a man like that. Jesus was very sensitive to such influences. We read of Him on one occasion that He could do no mighty work there—it was in His home town—because of their unbelief. His healing hand was stayed by the unfriendly atmosphere which surrounded Him. Weariness of this kind of course reacts on the body. Many a man drags around a tired body all day long because he is mentally weary—weary of the influences which surround him, of the subtle forces he has to fight apparently in vain, of the lack of results in his work, of the depressing conditions of his home life, and of many kindred things. We have a very expressive phrase in our American vernacular which people of other countries are apt to remark on. "He makes me tired," we say, or "This sort of thing makes me tired." It is an expressive picture of the man wearied with people or with events or with conditions against which he battles in vain. How many people in these recent years have been war-weary, and drive-weary, and life-weary. Very much of the trouble of life is just the friction of tired people who are

weary with the journey and have got on each other's nerves.

Let us see then what we are told of the wearied Christ. We are told two or three very suggestive things:

1. He sat. That is to say he rested. The trouble with the tired man is that commonly he does not know when to stop. The more tired and restless he is, the more it seems to him he must keep going. To sit down anywhere for long would be torture. To keep on seems so necessary for him and for others that though wearied with the journey he presses on. In my boyhood home there was one son who, physically, was the strong man of the family. When there was any heavy load to carry it was laid on him without hesitation, and he was always ready. When the war began he was at the head of a concern in England making engines for ships, and the pressure of Government orders kept him, always a hard worker, busy day and night. In the strain laid upon him his heart gave symptoms of trouble. Finally he consulted Sir James Mackenzie, who said to him, "There is no permanent damage to your heart, but you must stop at once." "I will," he said, "as soon as I can get certain things arranged." "You must stop at once," repeated the physician. But he thought he could not stop. It was a patriotic service to keep on. What true man would

have thought of himself while men by the thousand were dying in the trenches? But because he could not stop, one day the tired heart stopped, and two young sons are left forever without a father's care. One of the lessons many of us have to learn is the fact which the proprietor of a New York newspaper placed at the head of his editorial column the day after he arrived from Europe, called home because his two leading men, in a business quarrel with him, had resigned—"The indispensable man is not numerous." Almost anything and almost anybody can get along without us, unpleasant though the thought may be. And so it is better for the tired man often to stop for awhile than to go on and go under for always.

2. Then I read that Jesus sat by the well. That is to say, he rested in a refreshing place. That is always wise. Indeed it is essential to recovery from weariness. And there are many refreshing places in life. Fortunate the man who can go away for awhile from the noise and dirt of the city, from the endless round of meetings and committees, and get into contact with nature in God's great out-of-doors, and hear the birds singing or sit by some river as it flows to the sea, or sail on the ocean a hundred miles from land. A young man suffering with a nervous breakdown was surprised when the eminent specialist he consulted said to him not, "Take these pills," but

"Go out into the country, take a glass with you and study the movements of the birds." It might have been the Great Physician himself who said it; for it was just He that said to the anxious people of old, "Behold the fowls of the air." Even if a man cannot go from the city for any length of time, even if he be tied by what seem unescapable conditions to a narrow environment and a tiresome task, surely there are many refreshing places in life which remain even for him. There are great souls with their eyes on the big and beautiful things of life, with unfailing cheer in their voices and courage in their grip, who will come and speak to you if you will but open the pages of the right book and read, be it only a few well chosen pages. Such companionship will often do far more for a man than the movies. In it he will be resting by the well as Jesus did.

3. And then I notice that Jesus was never too tired to be interested in people. That is a great gift. Some of us have known moods of weariness in which our chief desire was to get away from people. We would dash around the corner to avoid meeting them if possible. That is not a healthy weariness, nor is it a weariness that uses the reviving medicine that God often has in store for us. As Jesus sat there a woman came, a woman with a story, a woman with a need, a woman with a sin. And not too tired to help her

to draw water, Jesus was not too tired to talk to her, not too tired to bring to her out of what had seemed the exhausted resources of His own spirit, newness of life she so much needed. It was to her He said some of the greatest words that have ever fallen from human lips, words which have come singing down the ages to tired souls ever since. "Every one that drinketh of this water shall thirst again, but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life." This, remember, from a tired man!

When I hear Him saying that I am not surprised at the sequel. His disciples, leaving Him by the well, had gone off to a near-by village to buy food and when they returned, amazed to find Jesus talking with the woman, they said, "Master, eat." They thought that was what the wearied Christ needed—food—sometimes it is. But He, in the joy of the great experience that had come to Him by the wellside, in the new sense of His Father's presence that had come to Him as He ministered to one of His Father's children, said, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." Is that an experience of Jesus only? I think not. Some of us have known days when any ministry of helpfulness seemed impossible. We were too tired. We did not feel like it. But something within us,

some voice of conscience that would not be silenced, drove us forth, and we went out to see, perhaps, some one who had far more to be weary of than we, some one whose burden was far more real, far more bitter than ours. We went forth just to a duty, of which no immediate result seemed possible. But in the very doing of it, or in the contact with that other spirit more needy than we, our weariness was gone. The whole of life was transfigured. We could begin again with new heart and hope.

Now the great refuge of all who are wearied with the journey, whether physically tired or spiritually tired, is to get into contact with the same Jesus who ministered to this woman at the well. He is not simply a figure of long ago, He is very near at hand to-day. If you will sit down long enough amid the pressure of your cares and the tedium of your weariness to talk to Him sincerely, unreservedly, wholeheartedly, obediently, believe me, He will speak to you and fulfill His promise which only one who had been wearied by the journey himself could ever have made: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

Art thou weary, art thou languid,
  Art thou sore distrest?
"Come to Me," said One, "and coming,
  Be at rest."

Chapter XIX

Fools for Christ's Sake

> Would that you could bear with me in a little foolishness.
>
> 2 Corinthians 11 : 1.

A very extraordinary opening to a section of St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians which covers this and the next chapter! It is as though a man should say to his friends, "Forgive me if for a few moments I make an ass of myself," a privilege of our frail humanity which many of us at times exercise freely, but for which we rarely pause to ask of our friends permission.

As we read, it becomes manifest that the foolishness which St. Paul has immediately in mind is the foolishness of self-vindication. At Corinth he has been under fire; the genuineness of his Apostleship has been questioned; he has been made to feel on every hand the sneer of depreciation. The Apostle, keenly sensitive like all highly strung men in bodily presence weak, bursts out hesitatingly, so much so that he can hardly come to the point, in an outpouring of self-defence, which as one reads casually, seems singularly unlike his self-effacing spirit, and still less like the

spirit of Him who, when reviled, reviled not again. Indeed so much did St. Paul feel this, and fear it, that he definitely and distinctly separates his Lord from any responsibility for what he is saying—"That which I speak, I speak not after the Lord, but as in foolishness"—an interesting flashlight, by the way, upon the nature and method of inspiration. Were this simply an outburst of human nature on Paul's part, if like Peter, under the stress of circumstances, he let go and said things, most of us could not well think the less of him, for we are men of that sort, though we have begun to learn, some of us, that time is the great vindicator, that discreet silence often speaks volumes, that the best case possible can be distorted into all sorts of error and injustice if minds are set upon distortion, and that nowhere is faith in God better exercised than in trusting Him in His own time and way to bring truth and justice to the throne. Especially, I think, we would gladly forgive Paul, when we remember that out of his human frailty, were it so conceived, have come two of the most priceless autobiographical fragments in all literature; that marvellous summary in a sentence [1] of the cost of his service for Christ, the perils, sufferings, persecutions, he had endured; and that great glimpse of a human spirit, tried almost to

the breaking point, crying to God for deliverance from the physical frailty that limited and tried him day by day. "Concerning this thing I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me," and the wonderful response, "and He said unto me, No, Paul, My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

But I do not think one can read thoughtfully and feel that Paul had simply let go under stress. There are times when self-vindication is not only wise but necessary; Paul's letter makes very clear a principle of action which in the wrongs and bitternesses of life may well be our guide. When no one but yourself is concerned, when the thought in your heart is how you feel, how your pride has been injured, what injustice has been done you; better be quiet, take your medicine, and give your mind the antidote of a change of thought from some world of wider interest. But if the interests of others are concerned, and especially if the interest of Christ is wrapped up in the matter at issue, if you can honestly feel that such larger interests are your supreme interests, then there may be a place, as there was with Paul, for the perilous business of self-vindication. Almost his first words give us a glimpse of the greatness of the man's heart. "I am jealous over you," he says, "with a godly jealousy, for I espoused you to one husband that I might present you as a pure

virgin to Christ. But I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." You see the point—that those who are assailing him are assailing his pride and reputation? No, no—his thought is that the whole structure of the work for Christ in the hearts of his friends and in the community which he has been privileged to do, is in peril, and so he gives himself in Christ's name to the effort to set the matter right.

But one cannot read the letters of Paul without feeling that the foolishness which was often in his mind was not simply the foolishness of self-vindication. The word is often on his lips. He tells us, you remember, that the preaching of the cross is to them that are perishing foolishness. He tells us that after the world through its wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believed. He reminds us that the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him. He tells us in so many words that the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, and that the foolishness of God—the very worst God can do—is wiser than man, and sums it all up in the great declaration that God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the strong. Is it any wonder that Dr. James Mof-

fatt, translating one of these apostolic phrases, speaks of "the sheer folly of the Christian message"? Now I do not think that all this is an argument for deliberately being a fool, for blinding one's eyes, for instance, to modern knowledge, or steeling one's soul against the discoveries and researches of modern science, or for assuming that God prefers to work through a consecrated windbag rather than through a devout scholar. No, Paul felt as many a man whose life is committed to the Gospel of Christ feels to-day, that much that he says and does must seem to the men and women to whom he appeals, living in a material environment, pre-occupied with material interests, as just so much foolishness.

What a foolish thing it is after all for any man to give himself in this age of commerce and industry and statecraft to the preaching of the Gospel! "Your preaching does no good," said a comforting friend in my own congregation, "people may seem to listen, but hearing is never translated into action." "Do not throw your life away," I heard a very successful business man say to a young man who was looking forward to the ministry, "do something real, get into business and make some money." Next Sunday of course he was in church and complained at the dinner table of the poor calibre of the modern preacher. What a foolish thing it is for us to be in this

somewhat dark and depressing building to-day when we might be out in the glory of the sunshine, enjoying God's great out of doors, playing golf, fishing some stream, or off in the motor; I fancy that some of our people are exercising such worldly wisdom this morning. What a foolish thing to conceive that this old Book, with its extraordinary stories of long ago, so far outside the realm of ordinary experience, has any message for the modern mind, or can reasonably be conceived as rivalling the masterpieces of modern literature! "Do we flatter ourselves," asks a student who has been learning things at college, "that we can speak to and be heard by the Power that started millions of worlds in motion? How preposterous!" What a wild thought that the great God who conceived and created the immensities of the universe can reasonably be thought of as interested in the blunders of John Smith, or as hearing his prayers; or that the life and death of a Galilean carpenter twenty centuries ago can have any relation to the destinies of a human soul to-day! How foolish to conceive that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses, that money is a minor interest, its only value when it is exchanged into the currency of self-development or of human service! What a crazy thing to conceive that pleasure is to be found in any way except by going out and

looking for it, that golf and bridge and the many games at which people play are utter stupidity when done as an end in themselves and only sensible for rational beings as a means of re-creation, that all pleasure that is worth the name is a by-product, coming incidentally out of the friction of life's great and strenuous efforts! What utter insanity to believe that love might reasonably be talked of by statesmen and diplomats as a practical means of solving the world's ills and healing its wounds, even before standing armies and reparations, and that the world's needs will never be solved until such pious platitudes as love and brotherhood are recognised as the supreme factors in the building of a civilisation that will live! How foolish for any man to conceive that the enduring values of life are other than the things we see and touch and handle, that man himself is not simply one of the ingenious mechanisms of the natural world, which goes through its motions according to its nature, and then passes out into silence and nothingness, or is merged again in the forces from which it came! What a puerile thing for any man to conceive that there is a spiritual personality more real, more near than any other personality with whom we are in contact, the God from whom we came, who was in Christ reconciling the world to himself—to conceive that the great business of life is to be right

with Him, nothing on the same level as that, and to do the work He gives us to do! Yes, surely there is good ground for any minister to-day, speaking on such themes, to say: "Would that ye could bear with me in a little foolishness."

And yet a study of the fools of literature and of history would be most enlightening. If we began with Scripture, we would have to list old Noah who built his ark when no one else saw any signs of a flood, and Isaiah who went through the streets of his city barefoot as a living prophecy of the poverty and desolation that was soon to come upon his land, and John the Baptist, who says of himself that he was a Voice crying in the wilderness (a man with noises in his head, distinctly queer), and the Lord Jesus, of whom the wise men of His time said that He was "beside Himself." William Carey was a fool to the good men of his time—and they told him so—when he started for India crying: "Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God"; and Robert Morrison when he said to the steamship captain, sneering at his purpose, "No, I do not expect to convert the teeming millions of China, but God can and will." Surely Father Damien was a fool when he gave his life to ministering in Christ's name to lepers; and John G. Paton when he turned his back on home and loved ones and went to live among cannibals; and David Living-

stone when he cried: "I shall open up a path to the interior or perish!"

What would our fathers have said of some man who dared to predict that people coming into this city of ours in the year 1923 would see from the train hundreds upon hundreds of houses, large and small, with a peculiar little cross beam on the roof, and that in every one of these houses was an instrument through which the human voice was heard speaking or singing hundreds and perhaps thousands of miles away? What would have been thought a generation ago of the man who would have told us that in 1923 men would fly across the American continent from coast to coast without a stop in twenty-seven hours?—a very few years, after all, from the time when men took weeks to travel from the Southland to reach the capital in Philadelphia, and usually arrived late. What would have been said of the man who would have dared to predict that in your home you would lift the receiver and talk to your distant friend as though he were in the next room, or that, sailing the seas, you would be in contact day and night with ships far distant and that in an hour of need you could summon quick relief? Would not the man have been reckoned a promising candidate for the asylum who had told us not long ago that *by the latest measurements* the sun is ninety-two million eight hundred and thirty

thousand miles from the earth, and that the more distant stars of the Milky Way are at least one hundred thousand trillion miles away from the sun; or that atoms, the bricks of which the material universe is built, are a million times smaller than the breadth of a hair; or that electrons are shot out of atoms at a speed that may approach one hundred and sixty thousand miles in a second.[1]

The truth is that growing knowledge is a progressive adjustment to "a little foolishness." Surely then, we should be very reverent in the presence of the marvels of the universe and the boundless possibilities of the human spirit; very reverent and responsive most of all to the God who is seeking us and speaking to us even as these voices that fill the spaces if we have but the instrument to hear with, a pure heart; and the will to obey in an earnest life. Surely we should be very ready to put into action every day the faith that the things which are unseen are eternal, and that the one thing for the man who, in the records of eternity, is not to be reckoned a permanent imbecile, is to discover for himself and for the world the wisdom of God as it is wonderfully revealed in this Book, and most of all in our Lord Jesus Christ, and then to make that wisdom his daily and unfailing guide.

[1] "The Outline of Science," Thomson.

Has not the world come to its present pass very largely because men and women, such as we are, professed disciples of Christ, pledged to His service, have yet not been willing as these men of old were willing, to be fools for Christ's sake, but have been moulded and swayed far too much by the world's cheap conventions? It is here that most of us need to make a new and thoroughgoing beginning. For foolishness that has been learned at the throne of God and at the cross of Christ is the only enduring human wisdom there is.

THE END

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